X-Wing Vs. TIE Fighter • Outlaws
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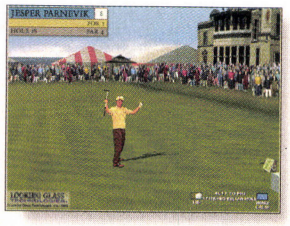

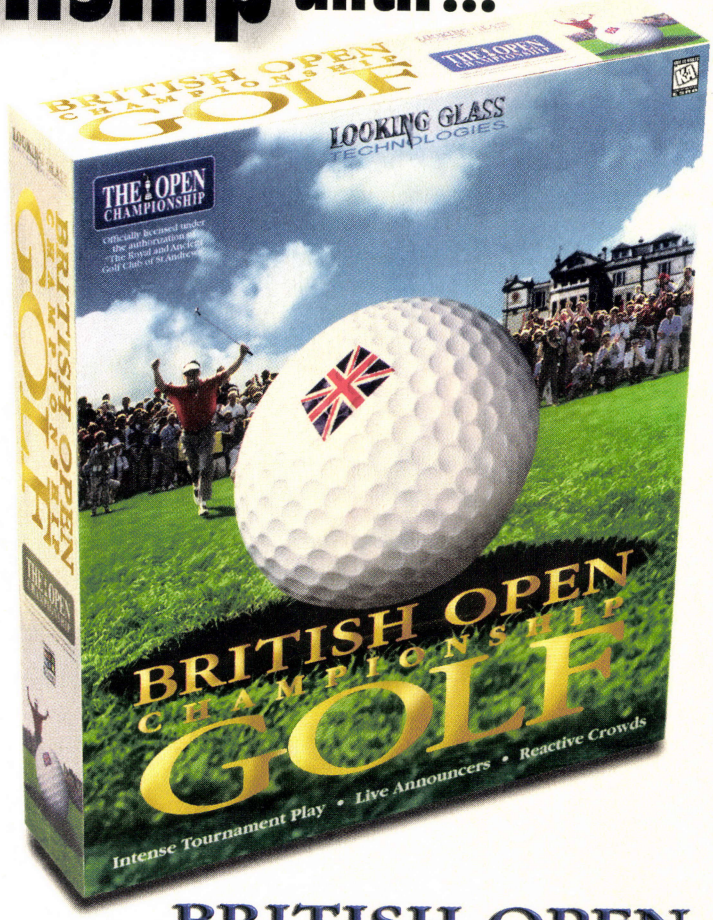

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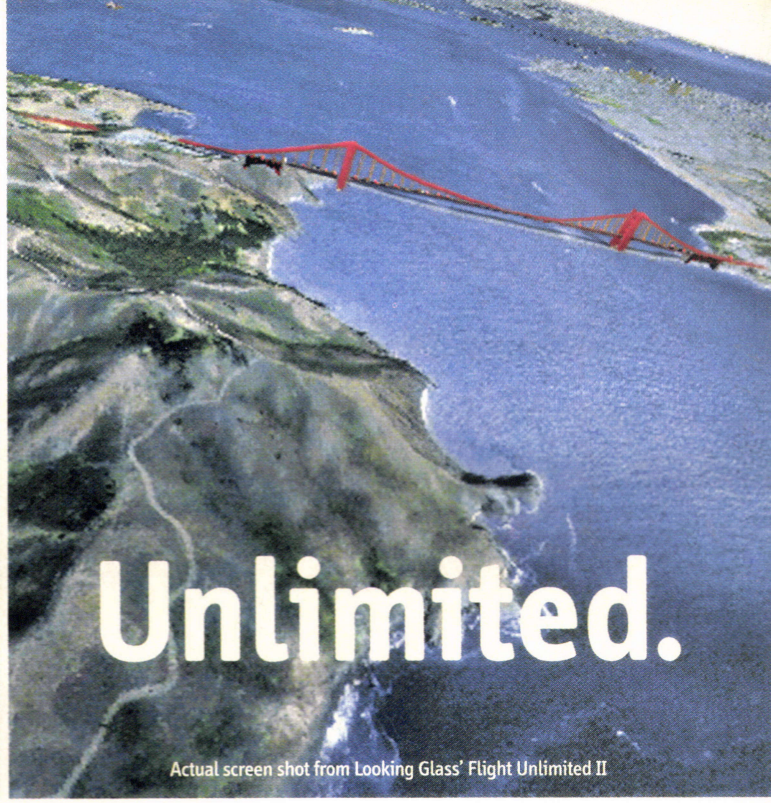

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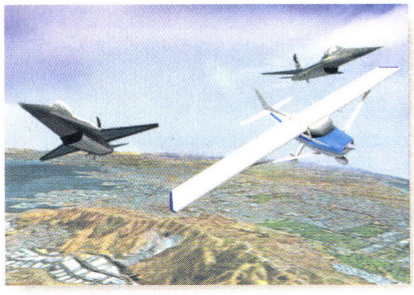

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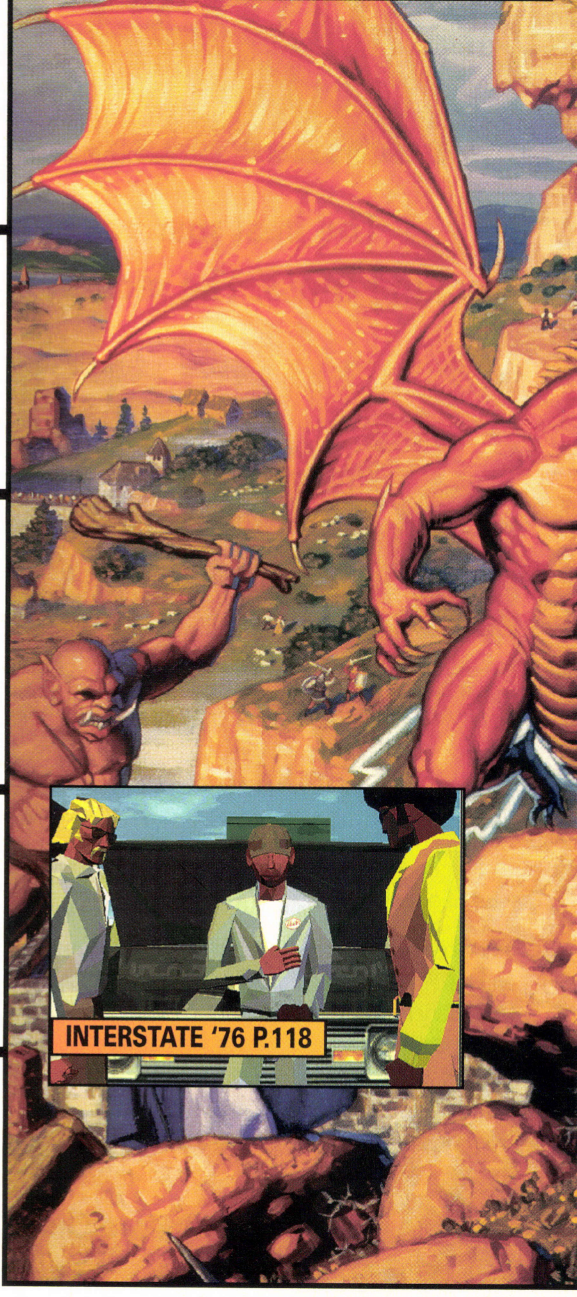

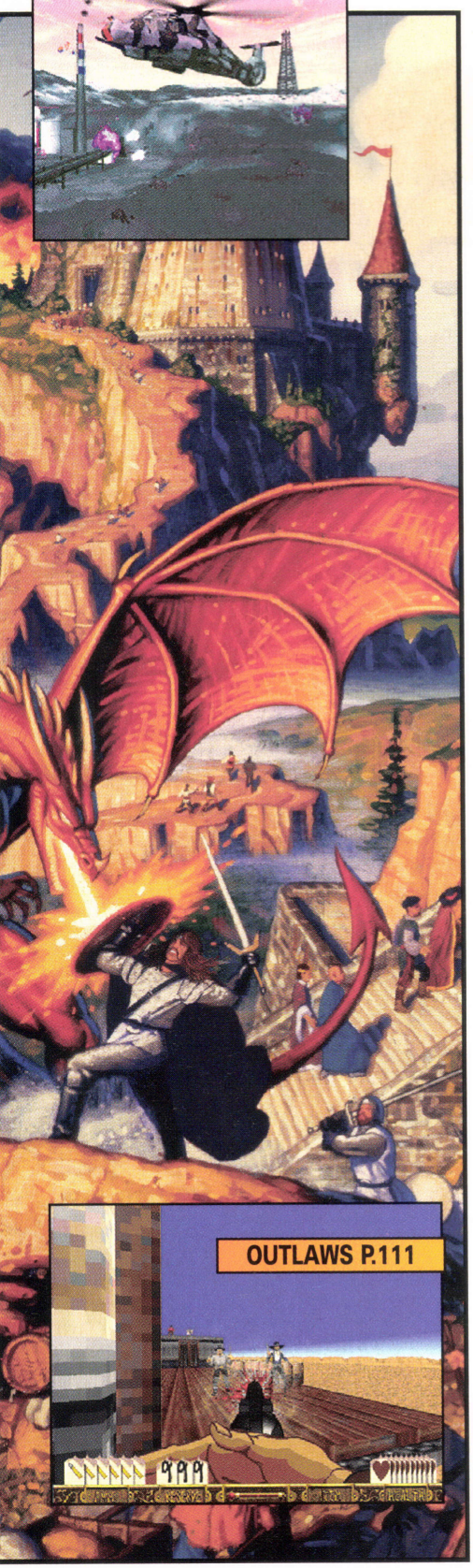

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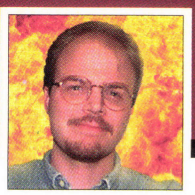
EDITOR'S NOTE



STEVE KLETT

Long Hot Summer

Ah, summertime. A time to enjoy the great outdoors, get a tan, go to the drive-in—certainly not a time to be inside playing computer games. Or is it? Typically, the summer is a slow period for the games industry, and while that may be the overall case again this year, a few hot releases from some major players are threatening to cut into gamers' typical summer activities everywhere.

The primary offender may well be Origin's much-anticipated (and for very good reason, too) Ultima Online, which is, of course, the evolution of its hallmark RPG to the Internet—and this month's cover story, page 50.

Origin and Lord British look to be creating the closest thing to a virtual world yet, and the communal and social aspects of Ultima Online may change the way we look at online games in the future. Two hundred players at once—pretty much the current limit—may no longer be acceptable once Ultima Online comes out and lets 3,000 players into a game, all at the same time. But now, why would you need to go outside when you can go to a bar, meet women (well, characters who at least claim to be women), or go adventuring without ever leaving your PC?

Then there's LucasArts, which has been quiet for a while but is waking up of late in a big way, releasing the first-person Western adventure/shooter Outlaws and the extremely addictive X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter multiplayer furball-fest (see reviews on pages 111 and 106, respectively).

Outlaws may not break any technical ground in terms of its game engine, but it has some qualities that are pretty unique to the action genre—namely, story, drama, and artistic taste. And X-Wing vs. TIE does the best job yet of putting you in the cockpit of a *Star Wars* fighter and really making you feel like you're there. The graphics, sound, and music—combined with the multiplayer madness—provide an adrenaline rush that no other *Star Wars* game can match.

Also, Lucas still has its ace up its sleeve—Jedi Knight, which may be out by the time you read this. What ever happened to the summer doldrums? I'll tell you what: The Force eradicated them.

That's not all, either—there are plenty of other games heating up the summer season. Some, such as Diablo and Interstate '76, may have been released earlier, but they continue to draw large gaming crowds—particularly online gamers—like blockbuster summer movies.

Then there's a little game called MDK....I won't say anymore, except that you should check out Rob Smith's definitive strategy guide to this amazing shoot-'em-up on page 72.

I could go on and on, but the end result is that while there may be fewer releases this summer, many are top-notch games that will keep you glued to your computer for more hours than you'll care to admit. There go my plans for a summer tan...

Oh yeah, I almost forgot: The entire *PC Games* staff is currently scouring the floor of the industry's biggest party—er, trade show—E3 in Atlanta. Stay tuned to *PC Games* for all the skinny on the fall and holiday seasons' big releases and hardware developments.

Steve Klett
Editor in Chief
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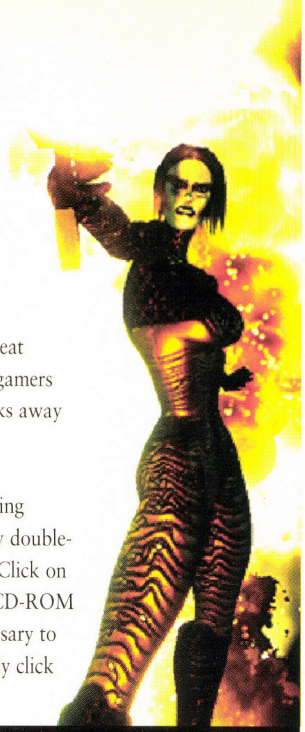

26 HOT DEMOS

Demo of the Month
Ultima IV (EXCLUSIVE FULL GAME) (Origin)

Games
Aaron vs. Ruth (Mindscape)
Ardennes Offensive (SSI)
Betrayal at Krondor (FULL GAME) (Sierra)
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain (Activision)
Darklight Conflict (Electronic Arts)
Deathmatch Maker (Virtus Corporation)
F/A-18 Hornet 3.0 (Graphic Simulations)
F-22 Lightning II (NovaLogic)
Interstate '76 (Activision)
Katharsis (Metropolis Software)
Lose Your Marbles (SegaSoft)
Marble Drop (Maxis)
Meat Puppet (Playmates)
IGZ (movie file) (Microsoft)
Outlaws (LucasArts)
Outpost 2 (Sierra)
Perfect Weapon (ASC Games)
POD (Ubi Soft)
Ten Pin Alley (ASC Games)
Web Vengeance (SegaSoft)
X-COM: Apocalypse (MicroProse)

Patches
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Interstate '76
Jack Nicklaus 4 course

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C&C: Red Alert Enabler
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C&C: Red Alert Enabler
Quake Enabler

Who wants to wade through pages of options to get to some great demos? Not us—hence the creation of the easiest-to-use CD gamers could ever wish for. Just pop it in and you're a mere two clicks away from playing some of the latest, hottest game demos around. Enjoy!

PLEASE NOTE: The CD interface should run without problem using Windows 95's Autoplay. Should you encounter any problems, simply double-click on the setup file found in the root directory of the CD-ROM. (Click on My Computer, right-click on the PC Games icon representing your CD-ROM drive, then locate and double-click setup.) This installs the files necessary to run the interface. If you encounter an error registering any file, simply click on Ignore and the interface will run without problems.

Getting Started

Win 95
Simply place the CD in your disc drive and the interface will burst into life with the Autorun function.

Win 3.1
Insert the CD in your disc drive. In Program Manager, select the File menu and then Run. In the command-line box, type d:\pcgames.exe (where "d" is the letter of your disc drive).

This is where you'll find all the games featured on this issue's CD. Click on any of them to highlight the relevant information about a game.

Get up and running on the online services in a flash. Click on any of these services to run the setup routines instantly. You'll be online and playing as quickly and easily as possible.

Once you've selected a game from the Demos list, information about that game, installation advice (which may be pretty important, so please take a moment to read it), and some gameplay hints appear in this box.

A quick view of the type of game highlighted from the Demos list.

You really want to leave? Click here to exit from the interface.

Find out a couple of the forthcoming highlights on next issue's CD and in the magazine with a quick click here.

PC Games.com is one of the most happening gaming Web sites out there. Click on this button, and you'll be prompted to locate the executable file that runs your Web browser (it's likely to be iexplore.exe or netscape.exe). Once you've done that, this information is stored so that in the future, you're just one click away from the latest news, reviews, previews, and information.

Once you've selected a demo from the list and read the information in the instruction box, you're ready to install or play. One click on this button runs the install or setup routine for your selected demo. And there you have it—straight to the games.

DEMO OF THE MONTH

Ultima IV—

Full Game

What an exclusive! Generally accepted as one of the finest games of all time, Origin Systems' Ultima IV carried this groundbreaking series to new heights. An incredibly complex, entertaining, and involving RPG, it may look dated by today's high graphical standards (it was released back in 1985), but you can't ignore the story being told as the Quest of the Avatar begins.

It's a fitting introduction to the intriguing world of Britannia, which opens its doors for further adventure with the upcoming release of the much-anticipated Ultima Online. Because it's a DOS game (Windows 95 was but a pipe dream back in those days), some of the control functions may appear a little confusing. So take the time to read all the instructions—we've even included a hint guide to get you delving into the secrets of Britannia. Isn't it amazing how much great gaming could be packed into just 1MB?

Keyboard Commands (remember these?)

A: Attack—Attempt to engage thy foe with the weapon thou hast readied (Ready weapon command); must be followed by the direction of thy foe.

B: Board—Board a vessel or mount a horse.

C: Cast—Cast a magical spell; must be followed by the number of the player who wishes to cast it (not needed in combat or in dungeon rooms), and then the first letter of the desired spell. Note: All spells must have reagents mixed before casting.

D: Descend—Climb down ladder to next level of dungeon or building.

E: Enter—Go into such places as villages, towns, castles, dungeons, and shrines.

F: Fire—Fire a ship's cannons (once thou hast Boarded); must be followed by a direction. Note: Broadsides only!

G: Get Chest—Attempt to open (and disarm, if trapped) chest; must be followed by the number of the player who wishes to open the chest, except during combat and in dungeon rooms. Note: 'Tis wisest to use the player with the highest Dexterity when examining potentially dangerous chests, as this lessens the chances of setting off any traps.

H: Hole up and camp—Set up camp to rest and recover from thy wounds. Note: This command may only be used successfully with limited frequency.

I: Ignite a torch—Light a torch for illumination in dungeons. Requires a special item.

J: Jimmy lock—Use a magical key to unlock a sealed door. Must be followed by the direction of the door that thou dost wish to unlock.

K: Klimb—Climb up a ladder to the next level of a building or dungeon, or to reach the surface from the topmost level of a dungeon.

L: Locate position—Requires a special item.

M: Mix Reagents—Prepare material components of spells for later use. Note: Thou must have reagents mixed ahead of time to cast any spells. When asked "Reagent:", type the letter corresponding to the reagents desired and then hit Return when thou wishes to mix them.

N: New order—Exchanges the position of two players indicated within thy party, except for player #1, for thou must lead the party.

O: Open door—Open a door in the direction indicated.

P: Peer at gem—Requires a special item.

Q: Quit & Save—Saves the current game status to disk; thou may continue after this command or power down thy computer.

R: Ready weapon—Equip a player with the weapon of thy choice (if owned) for use in combat.

S: Search—Search thy exact current location for unusual items.

T: Talk—Allows a player to converse with merchants or townsfolk in the direction indicated.

U: Use—Use an item thou hast found during play by means of the Search command.

V: Volume—Toggles sound effects on or off.

W: Wear armor—Outfits a player with the armor of thy choice if owned for defense in combat.

X: Xit—(E)xit thy current form of transportation and continue on foot.

Y: Yell—Yell "giddyup" or "whoa" to speed up or slow down thy horse.

Z: Ztats—Displays the status and attributes of a selected player; if you press 0 instead of a player number, this command will display the lists of weapons, armor, items, reagents, and mixtures. The left and right arrow keys will scroll through these lists, while pressing any other key will return thee to game play.

Arrow keys: Control movement North/South/East/West.

In Case of Emergency

The all-new interface is incredibly easy to navigate, and you shouldn't encounter any problems in accessing the demos. If you do experience difficulties, please read the instructions in the information box carefully. Should the interface fail to run at all, make sure that you have run the setup file located in the root directory of the CD.

If that still doesn't resolve your problems, we can accept technical support e-mails about problems relating to the interface (not the demos themselves, which are the responsibility of the respective publishers). Direct these queries to ctou@pcgames.com.

MPG '97™

The Multi-Player Online Gaming Conference of the Year!

September 15-17, 1997
San Francisco • Pan Pacific Hotel

"Internet game revenue will explode by 2001 to $1.6 billion from its current $127 million slice of the market..." (April 1, 1997, Computer Retail Week)

Get the facts that you need to grow the online component of your games. Meet the players that will help you take advantage of the future of internet-based gaming. Attend MPG '97™, The Multi-Player Online Gaming Conference of the Year!

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Dean Debiase, President And CEO
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Jon Grande, Product Planner and Executive Producer
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Now that Battlezone is finally up and running, I'd like to thank each and every one of you who've created your free accounts so far. The response has really been overwhelming. With that said, I'm here to tell you what we're planning for this month and later on down the line.

For one thing, we're holding a "Duke Forever Storyline" contest. If you consider yourself an imaginative individual, go on and tap into that creative energy and submit your version of the plotline of Duke Forever. If we select your story, you'll receive an autographed copy of Duke Nukem 3D.

Also, remember in the last issue when I promised to have Ron Millar join in for a chat session? Well, I'm talking with Activision to get him to sit in with us on July 10, so have your Dark Reign questions ready.

As a side note, if you haven't done so already, be sure and point your browser to *www.e3live.com*, and check out all the coverage that *PC Games*—along with *GamePro* and the All Games Network—has put together. We really went all out to create a site where people could go for info on this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo.

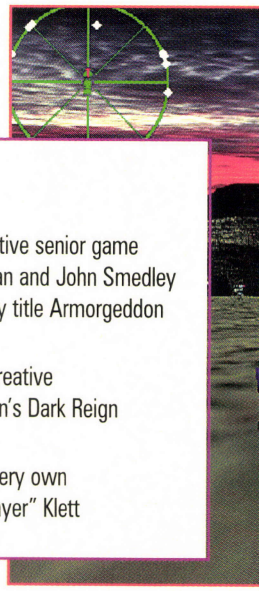
Now, here's a breakdown of what's going on in the Battlezone site as we speak, as well as some info on what's coming up down the road.

Joe McCloud
Assistant Online Editor

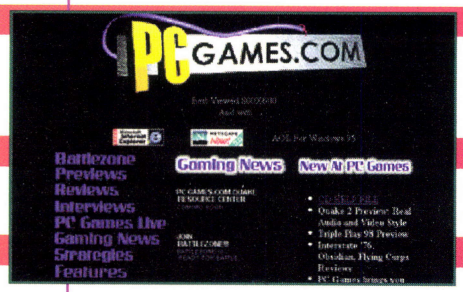
Going On Right Now

13 Interest Groups **11** Game/Company Channels

- RealAudio/Video interview with John Romero, chairman/game designer, Ion Storm
- Interview with Mike Gummelt, programmer for Hexen II
- Interstate '76: "Speak and Be Heard"
- Quake: Vote for your favorite level
- Submit your own Quake and Red Alert levels



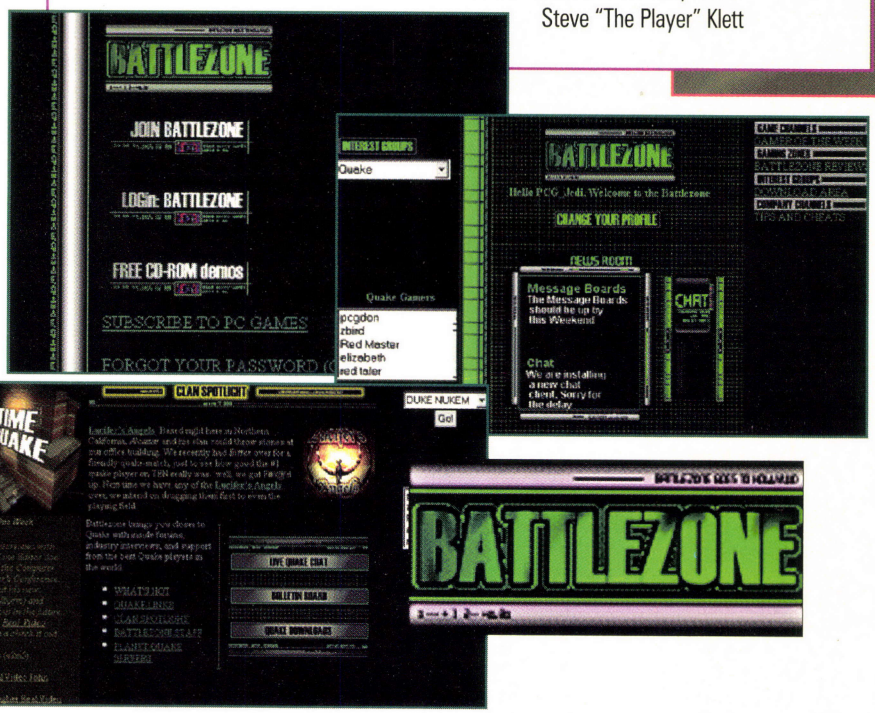
Around the Corner



July 3
Chat with Sony Interactive senior game designers Kevin McCaan and John Smedley about their Internet-only title Armorgeddon

July 10
Chat with Ron Millar, creative consultant for Activision's Dark Reign

July 17
Chat with *PC Games*' very own Steve "The Player" Klett



Down the Line

More Gaming Channels, including:

- Starcraft
- Unreal
- Daikatana
- Quake 2
- Duke Forever
- Hexen II
- Dark Reign

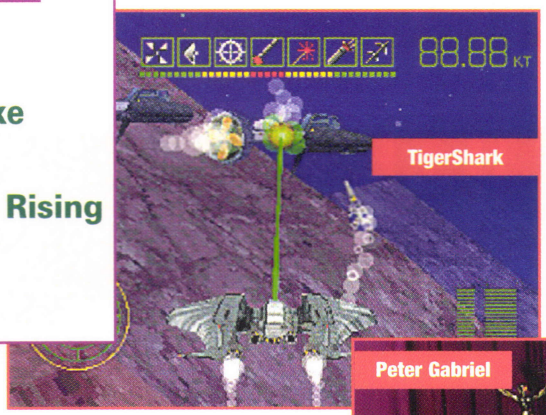
More Interest Groups, including:

- Nintendo 64
- Sony PlayStation
- Sega Saturn

Exclusive Reviews:

- TigerShark
- Red Alert: Counterstrike
- Grand Slam
- Rebel Moon Rising

GT Interactive's TigerShark gives you 21st-century action under the seas in a hot-to-trot "subfoil." We've also gotten our hands on Red Alert: Counterstrike, Grand Slam, and Rebel Moon Rising. Find out what we thought of 'em at **www.pcgames.com**.



Eve: Interview With Peter Gabriel

Rocker Peter Gabriel came out of the studio to meet the press for the release of his innovative new game, Eve, and *PC Games* was there. Check out PC Games.com for a sledgehammer of an interview about Eve, Gabriel's views on multimedia and the Internet, and even his new album.

Redline:

The Birth of a Game

Haven't been following our firsthand look at the making of Accolade's upcoming first-person actioner Redline? Never fear: You can check out all the installments and some extras on PC Games.com.

Coming in August:

The Quake Resource Center

Make this the first stop on your quest for Quake info, and you can make it the last, too. *PC Games* is filling your Quake needs with 24/7 news, features, files, mods—the whole shootin' match. Look for it at **www.pcgames.com** in August!

Expanded Preview:

Return to Krondor

If you survived Betrayal at Krondor, you're going to want more... and you'll get it with our first look at Return to Krondor. Go to **www.pcgames.com** for a longer, in-depth look at this much-awaited RPG.

Computer Game Developers Conference

...in RealVideo!

We don't just tell you about it, we show it to you. *PC Games* hit the CGDC with a Sony HandiCam, and we brought back interviews with the likes of Ion Storm's John Romero—yes, that John Romero—and Engage VP Cal Morrell. Plus, watch the TEN Quake tourney (and decide for yourself if you could've won!).

Strategy Guides:

- Magic: The Gathering
- G-NOME

All you Magicheads waited a long time for Magic: The Gathering...and now you want to know how to beat it, right? Well, *PC Games* gives you the answers at **www.pcgames.com**. Meanwhile, if your tastes run more toward the futuristic HAWC combat of G-NOME, no problem: We'll also have G-NOME strategies galore. Come and get 'em!

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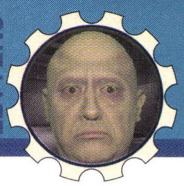


INCOMING!

Question of the Month: Great Games Revisited?

Anybody remember Kareteka? Or Archon? How about Double Dragon, or Rise of the Dragon? Or those old text RPGs like The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy? Yeah, we all remember our old favorites, and some of us still seek out those old floppy disks, or that old rusty computer, or an arcade with the old classics just to relive gaming's golden oldies. But what if you could update those experiences with today's technology—create a high-tech sequel to those games you can't let go of, a la Zork: Nemesis or the upcoming Pitfall 3D? Which game would you update, and what would the new version be like? What kind of game would it be, and what would the story involve? Send us your concepts; best idea gets a cutting-edge *PC Games* T-shirt and a free game. Mail: Letters to the Editor, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404; fax: 415-349-7482; or e-mail: pcgamesletters.com. Please include your full name with all letters.

First-Person Grows Up

I've resisted the impulse to buy a first-person shoot-'em-up for a few years now, but I will be buying Unreal, previewed in your May/June issue. My reasons: an intelligent storyline that clearly occupied the creator's attention for more than 20 minutes, the lack of satanic imagery for seemingly no reason other than to serve a paper-thin plot, and the humanization of women (who I happen to like quite a bit) by not only not presenting them as strippers/breeding devices, but actually allowing them as player-characters.

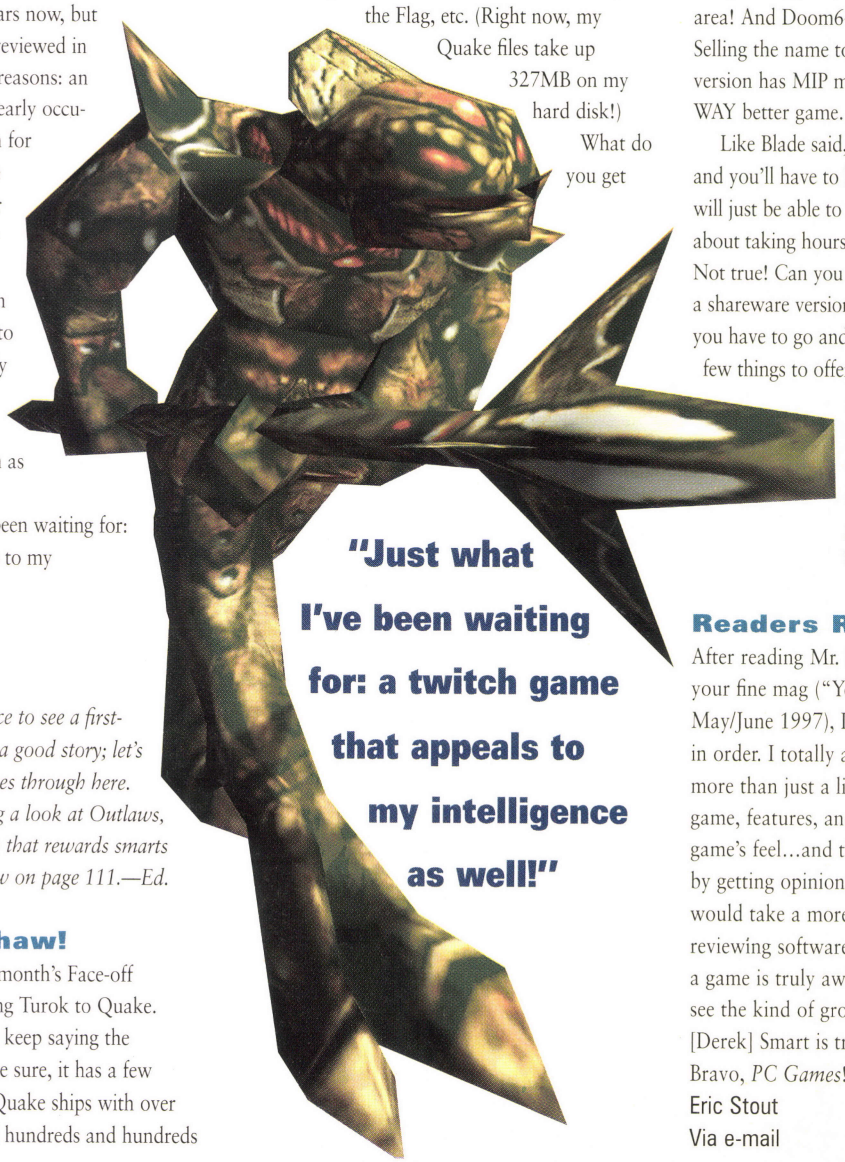
At last! Just what I've been waiting for: a twitch game that appeals to my intelligence as well!

Andrew Ebert
Via e-mail

We agree, Andrew—it's nice to see a first-person shooter aiming for a good story; let's hope the Unreal team comes through here. For now, we suggest taking a look at Outlaws, an intelligent shoot-'em-up that rewards smarts and strategy. See our review on page 111.—Ed.

Consoles? Pshaw!

I just finished reading this month's Face-off (May/June 1997) comparing Turok to Quake. Now, I'm not just going to keep saying the Nintendo 64 sucks, because sure, it has a few things to offer, but think: Quake ships with over 30 levels, and you can find hundreds and hundreds of other good Quake levels, or get the add-on packs, weapon add-ons, total conversions, Capture the Flag, etc. (Right now, my Quake files take up 327MB on my hard disk!) What do you get with Turok? Eight levels. Period. That's it, with no possibility of add-ons. Can you tweak your configurations with the N64? Nope. You're stuck with what you get: a plain old vanilla game. Quake itself wouldn't be nearly as good without all the add-ons.



"Just what I've been waiting for: a twitch game that appeals to my intelligence as well!"

As for Scary Larry's description of Quake's nailguns as "Little pea shooters that spit nails": (1) They're not pea shooters, you dimwit! (2) They are certainly more realistic than the weapons in Turok. I mean, come on, a nuke launcher? Give me a break!

And you'd rather work at the post office than play a multiplayer game? Are you ashamed that your N64 can't do that? Oh wait, I forgot—Super Mario Karts can support four players. Wow, so what? You can see where everyone is going! Then there's Hexen64, with its four-player split-screen. Oh, that's going to be fun—you can see where everyone is, plus you each get a five-inch viewing area! And Doom64—what was id thinking? Selling the name to Nintendo? "Oh, the new version has MIP mapping!" Now that makes it a WAY better game.

Like Blade said, your N64 will soon be outdated and you'll have to buy a new one, while your PC will just be able to make a simple upgrade. And about taking hours to install a game? Wake up! Not true! Can you hop on the Net and download a shareware version of an N64 game to try it? No, you have to go and buy it or rent it! The N64 has a few things to offer, though, like...umm...sorry, going to have to think for a while! P.S.—Larry, game of Turok? Oh, sorry, can't do that. In that case, game of Quake?

Adam Koebel
Via e-mail

Readers Rebut

After reading Mr. Hyland's "dressing down" of your fine mag ("Yellow Journalism?" Incoming! May/June 1997), I felt a little reader support was in order. I totally agree that a review should be more than just a listing of history behind the game, features, and bugs. It should be about the game's feel...and the only way to show that is by getting opinionated. If more magazines would take a more highly opinionated view in reviewing software, letting readers know when a game is truly awful, maybe we would never see the kind of grossly inadequate "crap" that [Derek] Smart is trying to pawn off on us. Bravo, *PC Games*!

Eric Stout
Via e-mail

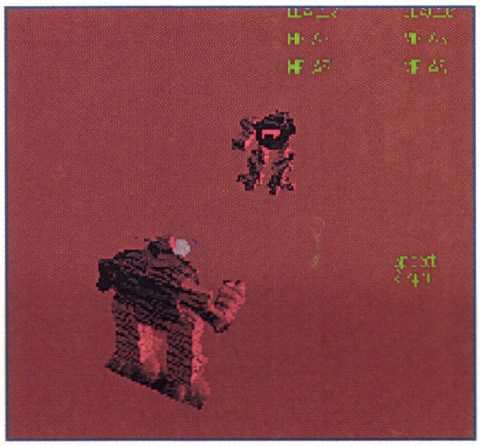
Yellow journalism, gimme a break. Your review of Battlecruiser 3000AD was right on target. I returned it after the fourth patch failed to stop the game from crashing.
Evan D. Baker
Via e-mail

See this month's GameWire section for news on the latest BC3K patch. —*Ed.*

Don't Forget MercNet

I've noticed that whenever your magazine discusses online gaming, MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries' free Internet play (MercNet) is strangely absent. Considering the large following this game has accumulated, I feel it should be noted alongside such masterpieces as Quake (QuakeWorld) and C&C: Red Alert (Westwood Chat).

I am General Legion of the Death Scorpions Merc Unit (**www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/3029/**). We play online via MercNet against other units and clans. We're in a league called Net



BattleTech (**nbt3068.housesteiner.com**), in which we battle other clans to take over territory in the Inner Sphere. It's a re-creation of the BattleTech role-playing game, only online. It is just as involving, if not more so, than any other online game.

All you need to play online through MercNet is a computer suitable for running Mercenaries (a high-end 486 or Pentium works fine) and a decent modem (a 28.8 works well). To play Quake as well as Mercenaries would require a faster computer.

In the future, please give Mercenaries and MercNet the credit they deserve.
"General Legion"
legion@emails.com

Consider it done, General —*Ed.*

Commie Code

Dear *PC Games*,
We were kinda curious and kinda bored, so we translated all the Morse code that was at the bottom of the C&C: Red Alert field manual. Everyone tells us that we are the only people who would ever do such a thing, so we figured we'd send it in and find out. Do you know if anyone has done one of these before?
Clint Levijoki,
Logan Hilman,
Jeff Young
rayyoung@ccinet.ab.ca

Er, can't say we've received any other Red Alert–decode letters, guys, although we have heard about the giant ants, which have gone on to earn a place in the official Red Alert add-on, Counterstrike. We applaud your effort, and were fascinated by the messages. Here, for the rest of our readers, is the second half of your translation (identical to the first half in all but form). Thanks for the submission. —*Ed.*

Whoops

In a heated, strategy-laying frenzy, we gave the wrong order number for Archimedean Dynasty and Settlers II: Gold Edition in our May/June issue. The correct number for publisher Blue Byte Software is 847-995-9951.

Red Alert Manual Decoded

Morse Code Translated by
Clint Levijoki and Logan Hilman
Transcribed by Clint Levijoki, Logan Hilman, and Jeff Young

MESSAGE
COMMANDER ALLIED
HEADQUARTERS
DECODE CRYPTO NORMAL
"RED EAGLE PASSES HAWK"

RED ALERT RED ALERT
SOVIET FORCES SECTOR SEVEN
BUILDING RUNWAYS
ASSAULT UNITS DISPATCH ASAP

MESSAGE
COMMANDER HEADQUARTERS
SEVEN
DECODE CRYPTO
"VULTURE SNACKS"

ALLIES LOSE VERDUN
FORCES DESTROYED
DISPATCH TROOPS ASAP
RETRIEVE TANYA
CRITICAL MOVEMENTS SPOTTED
NW SAHX
NUCLEAR WARHEADS DESTINED
WASHINGTON
DELAYED STRIKE AX ZULU
ADVISE ETA
DETAILED CINPACCOM

PRIORITY INCOMING:

INVESTIGATE SUDDEN DEATHS
FOURTEEN ALLIES TOXIC TESTS
SHOW FOMIC ACID LEVELS

TO CINCPACOM
PRIORITY SEVEN OUTGO

FOMIC ACID COMPLAINT ACCURATE
ALSO FIND CRUSHED VERTEBRATE
AND SLASHES ON HEAD
AND FACE. TWO THOUSAND
HEADLESS, NO BLEEDING
RESPOND

TO CINCPACOM

–SAY AGAIN, FOMIC ACID!
**Roger that, what is it?
–ACID ANTS USE.
**For what purpose?
–KILLING, NEUTRALIZING.
**Describe slash marks...
–LIKE BIG KNIVES, CHECKING...
TWELVE-INCH MARKS
ON HEADLESS, SOME MARKS,
SOME ACID.
**Do you hear humming?
–NEGATIVE ON HUMMING.
**Do you spot small hills?
–AFFIRMATIVE, THEY AREN'T ON
THE MAP.
**How far is your location?
–SIX CLICKS.
**Investigate...
–HOW? LOOKING FOR WHAT?
**Giant ants.
–LIKE SOME SCI-FI FLICK?
**Serious, all areas.
–GIANT ANTS, ROGER THAT!
**Use Raid, no joke!
–ANTS ARE TEN FEET HIGH! WHAT'S
THE HUMMING MEAN?
**Ant radar. Watch out!
–I HEAR SOME NOW!
**Get out of there!
Respond! Get out of there!

DISPATCH ENDS
ACTION—IGNORE, RESPOND?

IGNORE. USE DEEP COVER.
ANTS THAT BIG NEVER HAPPENED.
SYSTEM ALERT!

** Sectors report now!
–Alpha sector negative.
–Charlie sector negative.
–Bravo sector none.

** Delta sector!
** Delta sector, report!
** All sectors tune Delta!
–Confirm deaths.

–RED ALERT! RED ALERT!
–Giant ants spoored!
** Identify sector.
–Echo sector!
** Number? Size?
–Maybe one hundred. HUGE!
** Fire at will!
–Targeting...FIRE!
–Oh God! I cannot!
** Come in, Echo sector!
<Echo sector dead>
** Come in, Echo sector!
<Echo sector dead>

Gamers Seeking Gamers

Matt Alexander ..... MattDoom28@aol.com
Daniel Harata ..... Juarez 249
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Greg Payne ..... 117 Oakhurst Terr.
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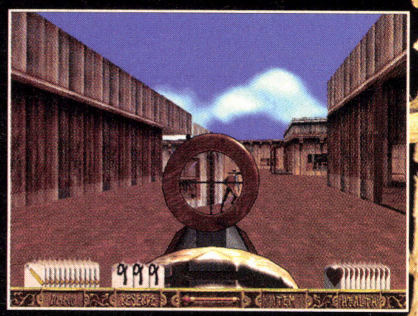
Wonder1@juno.com
Bill Rose ..... 3201 6th Ave.
Sioux City, IA 51106
Magic.Man@USSE.com
A. Stauber ..... areyounuts@juno.com
Jason Thornton ..... Darkmessiah@juno.com

Looking to meet fellow gamers? Send us your full name, along with an e-mail address, postal address, or fax number, and we'll do our best to fit you in to our ongoing list.

The Most Dangerous Man is the One with Nothing Left to Lose.



When outlaws murdered your wife, and took your daughter, everything you had was gone. Your gut aches for blood and sweet revenge. ***Dyin's too good for 'em now.***

Ride back into the wild west as the gun-slinging Marshall James Anderson. You'll encounter a dusty town, an abandoned mine, a runaway train, and the orneriest cowpokes this side of the Mississippi as you uncover a twisted plot of greed and corruption.

With weapons like your .45 six-shooter, your .44 rifle, your 10-gauge shotgun and your good ol' sawed off 12-gauge you'll be packin' plenty of fire power. Nothing warms the heart of a cold-blooded killer like hot lead.

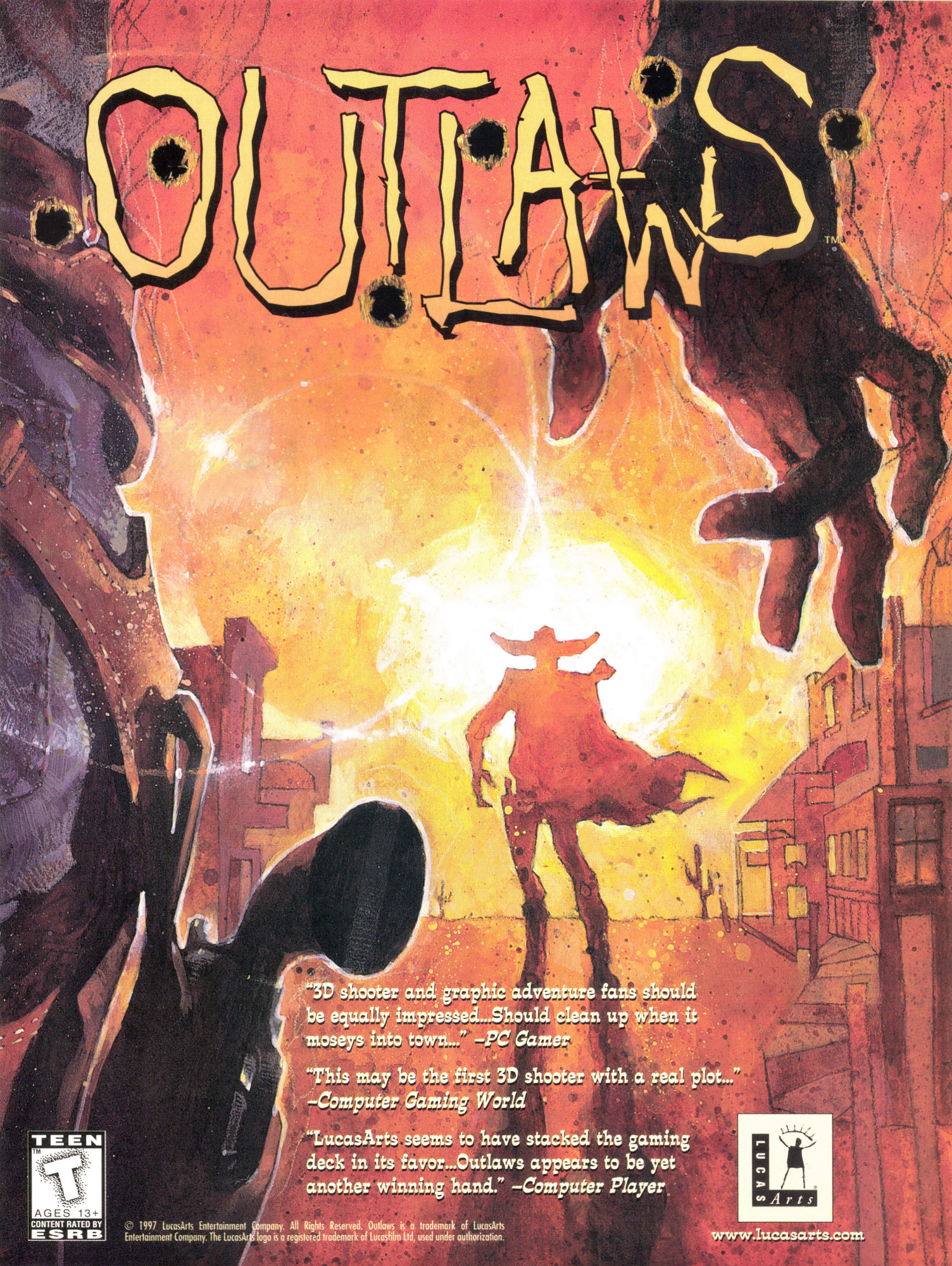
It's Payback Time.

OUTLAWS™

Three Game Variations
- Spaghetti Western Shooter
- Bounty Hunter Action
- Multiplayer Shootouts

Challenges the wit as well the trigger finger – Shooting the civilians may leave you swinging from a rope.

Multiplayer Games – Supports 2 to 8 players over modem, network or Internet. Form your own gang and hit the trail.



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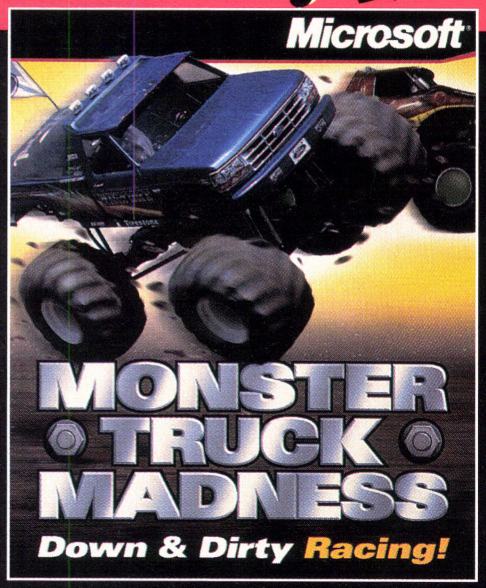
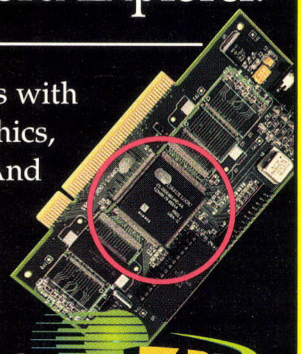
CIRRUS LOGIC and Microsoft® present:

The Laguna3D™ and Monster Truck Madness™

CHALLENGE.



Race Monster Truck Madness with Laguna3D Graphics and You Could Win a Ford Explorer.



Race Monster Truck Madness with Laguna3D™ accelerated graphics, and the action comes alive. And by entering the Monster Truck Madness Tournament, you could win a new 1997 Ford Explorer. Sign up at the Web Site and take some practice runs. Who knows, maybe you'll drive away a winner! For complete details visit:

www.microsoft.com/games/monster

To participate, you must own one of the following products featuring Laguna3D graphics and a retail copy of Microsoft Monster Truck Madness.

GrafixStar 550

VideoLogic

Graphics Blaster 3D

CREATIVE
WWW.SOUNDBLASTER.COM

Laguna3D is a trademark of Cirrus Logic, Inc. All other trademarks are the property of their respective companies. Open to U.S. residents only. Void in the states of FL, VT, MD, AR and where prohibited by law. Contest begins 5/15/97 - ends 8/24/97. Official rules available at www.microsoft.com/games/monster

What Part of "Unlimited" Don't You Understand?

When does "hogging bandwidth" apply to an online gamer? If you believe the PR departments of major, national-level Internet service providers, it's those folks who sign on and then never do anything but maintain a live connection. But if you live in Canada, and subscribe to Netcom, hogging bandwidth can also mean that you're pouring hours into active gameplay.

Playing too much Red Alert online could get you disconnected.

CONCENTRIC NETWORK CORPORATION

According to a story broken by *The New York Times*, Netcom is testing a new policy that it may bring to the United States. Canadians who have signed up for Netcom Canada's "unlimited" payment plan could be in for a disturbing shock when they are abruptly disconnected with only a discreet warning message just prior to their connections being terminated. How can Netcom Canada get away with this? By pointing out a semantic loophole that would be the envy of even the U.S. government.

Ronald J. Close, president of Netcom Canada, said in a statement that Netcom's usage agreement refers to the plan as "unlimited access," not "unlimited usage." Translated, that means Netcom is only obliged to provide unlimited dial-up access, not unlimited hours. B.S.? Maybe, but Close justifies the distinction by pointing out that "a small percentage of members were eating up a majority of the network."

The larger question is whether this "limited usage" trend catches on. What would be the implications for avid online gamers, especially those involved in games that require a great deal of time to become at all successful—games such as Studio 3DO's Meridian 59 or Origin's Ultima Online? Bottom line: Netcom and other ISPs want to charge you more money for heavy usage and faster connections.

So far, providers like America Online, The Microsoft Network, and AT&T Worldnet are still holding their ground and sticking to their flat-rate $19.95 "unlimited" guns, and are supplying their

continued on page 25

COVERT OPS

Sierra Flexes Muscles

Look out! Sierra On-Line plans to release at least 16 major game titles between September and December. Here's the schedule by month:

September • Among the first releases are Civil War Generals, a follow-up to Robert E. Lee: Civil War General, and CyberStorm 2: Corp Wars, which picks up where the MissionForce: CyberStorm strategy game left off. There's also Demon Isle, a first-person shooter in which gamers become bounty hunters paid to purge an island of evil, and Front Page Sports: Ski Racing, a fast-paced downhill simulation. For World War I buffs, Red Baron II adds a smarter AI and a more dynamic mission generator for better random missions.

Demon Isle

October • Some hardcore types may sneer, but many gamers will welcome the latest in the 3D Ultra Pinball series, The Lost Continent. Two more Front Page Sports entries include Trophy Rivers and Football Pro '98. From the same designers who put together the Lords of the Realm series comes Lords of Magic, an empire-building game steeped in magic. SODA Off-Road Racing is a 3D truck-racing simulation, and flight-sim fans not content with their mounts can use X-Fighters to tinker with World War II fighter designs.

SODA Off-Road Racing

November • Set 300 years after the last battle, EarthSiege 3: Future Wars adds LAN, Internet, and modem multiplayer options. Police Quest: SWAT 2 is full of new terrorists, psychos, and punks to take down, while Quest for Glory: Dragon Fire is a quasi-RPG bursting with mythological monsters.

December • King's Quest: Mask of Eternity is the eighth entry in the timeless adventure series.

I Want My DVD

Access Software is positioning itself at the top of the DVD-ROM wave. Taking full advantage of DVD's storage capacity (now 4.7GB, or roughly eight times that of a CD-ROM) and superior full-motion video (FMV) and audio capabilities, Access will release the newest title in the popular Tex Murphy puzzle-based "interactive mystery" series, tentatively dubbed Poisoned Pawn, as a built-for-DVD-ROM title this fall. A CD-ROM version is expected in early '98.

CD-ROM–based FMV has often left gamers wanting, with poor frame rates of 10 to 12 frames per second—half that of movies. But if DVD-ROM lives up to its hype, games like Pawn can deliver full-screen FMV at 30 frames per

continued on page 27

AT THE WIRE

GAME BYTES

Ion Storm

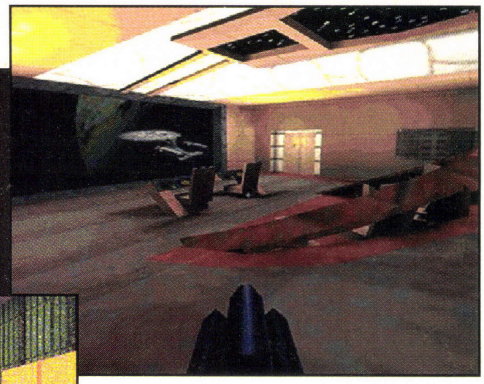
Ion Storm, John Romero's new computer-game design company, has officially announced the names of its first titles. Diakatana is an action/adventure game and Anachronox is a role-playing game, though both products will blur those genres, says the developer. Romero's grand design is to create new titles that combine 3D action/adventure, role-playing, and strategy elements into a single game.

Capcom Joins QSound

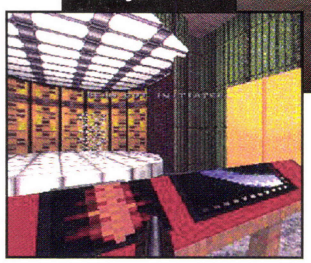
Capcom and QSound Labs have teamed up to offer a combination of multimedia software and video games with real-time, interactive 3D audio technology. This agreement will involve the use of all of QSound's cross-platform developer tools, including QMixer, the company's software audio mixer. Look for these audio enhancements in upcoming PC and console games from Capcom.

TEN Sees Green

Total Entertainment Network (TEN) has raised more than $12 million in new investment capital. The new funds will go toward further content acquisition, technology upgrades and additions, and ongoing updates to the online-gaming service. TEN believes these improvements will distance the service from its competition in the area of performance.



The new *Star Trek: TNG* mod for Quake lets you take the Bridge—until someone else takes it from you.



Trek Quake

Seriously fun Quake mods continue to spawn. Andrew Wyllie has put together a grand deathmatch variation on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, titled Star Trek: The Quake Simulation. *Trek* fans will appreciate the attention to detail, including crew uniforms. There are multiple decks to traverse and plenty of recognizable locations from the Enterprise, including the Bridge, Sickbay, the Transporter Room, and more. Players get around via turbolifts and transporters, but be sure to check out the readme file to get the special keyboard commands. Also, be warned: This is a massive level, so don't play it with less than six people. NCC1701D.ZIP is a 1.5MB download, and you can get it from **www.pcgames.com**.

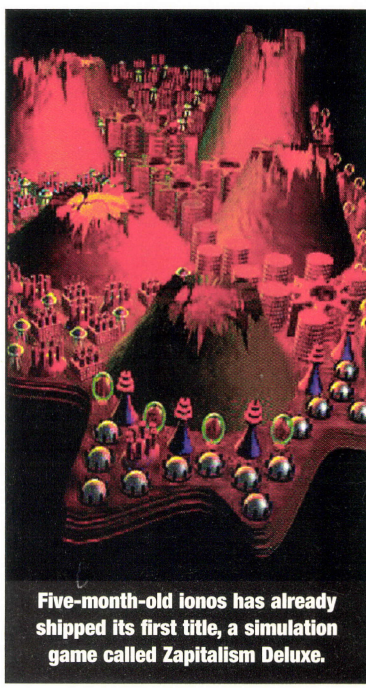
Deadlock Is Accolade's E3 Star

Although sports games such as Hardball 6 are Accolade's trademark, Deadlock 2 is the title the publisher has chosen to be its main product at this year's E3 trade show in Atlanta, Ga. The story takes place in a time following the battle for Gallius IV. Ancient artifacts have been found with clues to where the homeworld of the ancient species lies; players must gather their resources and hop between planets in a search for the long-lost prize. Victory by combat or by alliance are the favored strategies for completing the game. Deadlock 2 will feature 42 new scenarios, 14 new building types, 13 new technologies, a new interface, and enhanced AI. There are also nine new units, including submarines, surface ships, and aircraft, and the game will support LAN, modem, and Internet multiplayer games. Deadlock 2 will ship for Win 95 systems by Christmas.

World-hopping is the order of the day in Deadlock 2.

ionos Deals a Piece of the Action

Can a publisher that cuts its developers in on 50 percent of the action make it in the cold, hard world of computer games? That notion is the operating technique of 5-month-old ionos. The publisher hopes to draw more talented young design teams with "the next big thing" in PC games. ionos has just announced Nebula Fighter, its second release. Developed by Holodream, Nebula Fighter is an old-fashioned side-scroller with 3D visuals that supports two players in cooperative mode. According to ionos, the game features an extended strategy element necessary to combat the often sneaky and capable AI. Expect Nebula Fighter sometime in October.



Five-month-old ionos has already shipped its first title, a simulation game called Zapitalism Deluxe.

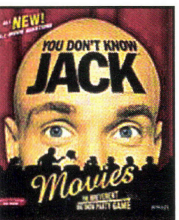
Swedes Nail Finns In Quake Tourney

Could Quake soon rival that other football sport (read: soccer) in worldwide competition? A bunch of Swedes and Finns decided to go international in a recent one-hour tourney that ended with a final tally of 2,338 total frags. The inspiration for the match was the arrival of id's new 32-player Quake server. The leader of Swedish clan BLI challenged the top Finnish Quaker, Perkele, to gather 15 players for the match, and the battle was joined. The Swedish players carried the day with 1,437 frags compared to Finland's 901.

Graphix Zone

Goodbye GZ, Hello Ignite

Following its merger with Inscape, the multimedia home of Bob Dylan's Highway 61 Revisited and the Prince CD-ROM has been napalmed away in a corporate restructuring that dissolves the Graphix Zone name and many of the publisher's music and reference product lines. The company's new image will be built around games and the name Ignite, Inc. "We assessed our assets and decided to concentrate on a core product strategy of PC games and branded game titles," says vice president of marketing Robert Sebastian. According to Sebastian, Graphix Zone hasn't had a real hit in years, at least not since Highway 61. "Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy! are the only titles out of that catalog that sell like crazy today," he says. "We'll continue with those through the length of our license. As for the future, we're well-capitalized and intend to develop new games in house and pick up others for distribution. Inscape will continue to release its own products under its own label, but everything else will carry the Ignite logo."



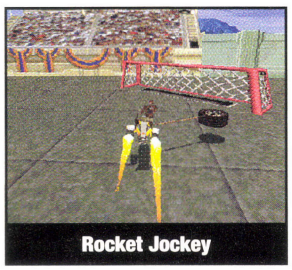
The ever-expanding You Don't Know Jack franchise is now part of the Sierra universe.

Sierra Knows Jack Better Now

In a very quiet buyout, Sierra On-Line's parent, CUC, has acquired Berkeley Systems for an undisclosed amount. According to a Sierra spokeswoman, the deal was made specifically to gain control of Berkeley's popular You Don't Know Jack franchise. Berkeley will continue to operate as a separate division out of its Northern California facilities, and its products will carry the Berkeley logo. The Sierra logo will be added to the boxes as well, however.

Disney, Rocket Science Hit With Shrinker

The computer-game industry continues to contract, as Disney Interactive laid off 21 percent of its 425-person work force, plus an undisclosed number of contract developers. Disney decided to downsize because it wants to cut down on the number of games it makes for teenagers and concentrate on the 3- through 12-year-old crowd. Disney intends to use more outside development partners for its upcoming properties, such as the animated film *Hercules*. However, even one of Disney's most successful partners, Pixar, which developed the Toy Story games and movie, has pulled out of game designing as well.



Rocket Jockey

Meanwhile, at Rocket Science, the company behind Obsidian and Rocket Jockey, all of the development staff have been laid off. Rocket Science was most recently aligned with SegaSoft in a major publishing deal, but apparently the companies had a falling out, leading to Rocket Science's current predicament. —*George T. Chronis*

"Unlimited," continued from page 23

customers with all the access and usage they can possibly handle. The Concentric Network, however, is beginning to try something else. Along with its $19.95 "unlimited access" plan, it's also offering customers a $39.95 "unlimited access" plan.

Confused? Why would you pay more for the same thing, you ask? Scott Eagle, president of marketing for Concentric, says, "Subscribers of this new plan will be guaranteed priority access to the network without ever getting a busy signal, and a jump right to the top of the queue when calling customer support." Just what online gamers want to hear—paying more for the satisfactory performance they need to play games online.

Eagle says unlimited access is different from unlimited usage: "It's not fair to subscribers when three percent of the users are the ones that are taking advantage, creating all the busy signals. For that three percent, we will offer a professional plan that allows them to stay on as long as they want."

Whatever ISPs have in mind for online hogs, it seems apparent that a change is coming in the not-so-distant future. In fact, Kristen Kappos, vice president of corporate communications at EarthLink Network, says that although the company's business model allows it to stay at a flat rate of $19.95, "premium service offerings" may be coming in the future. This could certainly be the case if local telephone companies are successful in their efforts to have state governments impose special Net access surcharges on ISPs.

—*Joe McCloud*

THE GREAT CATACLYSM HAS LEFT THE EARTH IN CHAOS.

Want to play Jedi Knight online? Rebel HQ is where you have to go.

Microsoft Feels the Force

Now that LucasArts is bringing multiplayer options to the Dark Forces universe in Jedi Knight, you might have expected the guardians of the Force to go it alone by setting up their own online servers a la Westwood and Blizzard. Wrong. "What's the advantage of setting up your own server network?" says LucasArts president Jack Sorensen. "Instead of devoting enormous resources to setting it all up, we'd rather make games." Instead of going the rebel route, LucasArts is aligning itself with the Imperial online troops of Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone. Under the deal, the Zone becomes LucasArts' preferred host for its new Internet-capable games. The first game to go live under the agreement is Outlaws, to be followed shortly after by X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter, Jedi Knight, and Rebellion. To keep the focus on LucasArts, gamers will reach the games via a branded launch area called Rebel HQ at **www.rebelhq.com**. In addition to lobbies and chat rooms, the site will also feature game and Internet FAQs.

Total Entertainment Network Upgrade

The Total Entertainment Network has updated its service software to version 1.2. Along with what you're already familiar with, TEN 1.2 adds e-mail, a Web browser, a finder to locate players who are online, and the ability to talk to other users. A TEN representative says the software update is meant to enhance gamer interaction on the service and make it more attractive to a mainstream audience. TEN currently has just under 30,000 subscribers, but the service hopes those numbers will increase with the added feature set. Also, TEN plans to add NASCAR Racing 2 to its slew of games sometime next month, which the company expects to help draw a larger audience to the service.

Cable You, Cable Me

Forrester Research just completed a study indicating that speedy cable modems, which could significantly improve Internet gameplay, will be much more available by the year 2001. If Forrester's projections come true, the number of U.S. households with cable modems will grow from 20,000 today to 7 million in 2001. The research house expects 500,000 in 1998, 1.75 million in 1999, and 3.5 million in 2000. Those numbers may appear optimistic, but Forrester bases them on how fast cable providers are rebuilding their networks. For example, 25 percent of TCI's network is two-way capable; by 2000, it should be 50 percent. By contrast, 50 percent of Time Warner Cable and Continental Cablevision networks are two-way today, while 100 percent should be in 2000. Most other national providers have similar schedules for adding cable modem service. Such service usually costs between $35 and $100 today and delivers speeds of 2MB per second. By contrast, ISDN transfers data at 128Kbps, more than 15 times slower than cable modems.

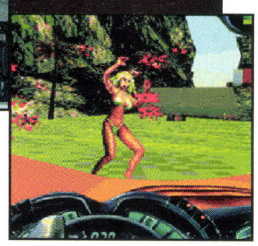
Show Us the Money!

Forget Westwood Chat: digitalNATION in Alexandria, Va., is offering a $500 cash purse to the best Red Alert player who participates in the monthly tournaments at **www.campbadass.com**. Webmaster Jason Korzen says his boss hopes to increase the dollar value of the prize as other

continued on page 30

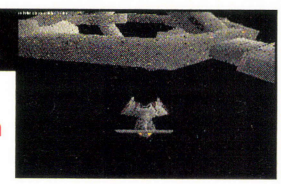
At the Wire

The AI in Carmageddon is pretty aggressive, so expect cars you've attacked to come gunning for you later.



Watch Out for That Cow

Interstate '76 may be getting all the car-crash attention lately, but Interplay will soon release a game called Carmaggedon that's closer to Twisted Metal than *The Dukes of Hazzard*. If you like the idea of running into pedestrians and cows as well as cars—and being rewarded for it—then Carmageddon is for you. Although PC Games hasn't seen the game in its SVGA mode, even in low-res, it's obvious that the car and level designs are a whacked-out joy. Vehicles sport everything from spikes to armored rams, not to mention the usual assortment of machine guns and rockets. Whether your alter ego demands a police car or a pimp's low rider, you're in luck: they're both here. Expect Carmageddon later this summer; it will support up to six players via LAN or the Internet.


Battlecruiser 3000 gets some bug spray.

BC3K Patch No. 5

For those of you who haven't been following the Battlecruiser 3000 AD debacle, the ambitious space strategy game has been plagued with two premature releases that led to a ton of near-fatal bugs that substantially crippled gameplay. Close to 200 bugs have been slain in patch version 1.01 C5, and developer Derek Smart says the game has been optimized substantially. Anyone who has version 1.00 in its U.S. or UK release can get the update on this month's PC Games.exe demo disc, or at **www.bc3000ad.com**. The C5 patch also updates installations that were updated with the earlier v.1.00 C4 patch.

—George T. Chronis

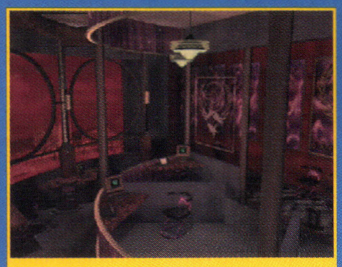
COVERT OPS

continued from page 23

second, plus give gamers the option of AC-3 or Dolby Digital surround sound.

Access' prior interactive mysteries, Under A Killing Moon and The Pandora Directive, combined considerable FMV with traditional search-and-retrieve gameplay based on the exploits of gumshoe Tex Murphy. Pawn, directed by Adrian Carr, features a cast that includes Michael York (*Logan's Run*, *Zeppelin*), and will take Tex back to one of his first, most deadly cases.

Other then being one of the first games to use DVD technology, Pawn doesn't appear to be bringing anything new to the puzzle-based gaming table. In fact, at 30 to 40 hours, the amount of gameplay will be about half that of Pandora Directive. Part of the reason is that Pawn needs to be finished in time to be included with a special bundle of titles shipping with new PCs later this fall, and even with DVD's storage capacity, Pawn's full-screen, 16-bit FMV will fill up all 4.7GB of space on one disc. According to Chris Jones, executive vice president at Access (and incidentally, the man who plays Tex), DVD's superior video and audio will help interactive games hold their own with other entertainment mediums. Whether Pawn will meet that challenge remains to be seen.



Having escaped aliens in The Pandora Directive, Tex Murphy returns this fall on DVD-ROM in Poisoned Pawn.

Rollerball, Finally

MGM Interactive hasn't been standing still. The division will release some new Win 95 games by the end of this year and has plans for a fifth in early 1998. Most interesting of the bunch is Rollerball, developed by Stormfront Studios and based on the cult science-fiction classic from 1975. Expect to manage teams of players on inline skates and jet bikes. LAN and two-person multiplayer modes will be available when the game arrives late this year.

Around the same time, MGM will release Silent Software's Return Fire II, which features a larger selection of air, land, and naval units than the original. Meanwhile, Big Grub is developing next year's Maximum Gauge, a space-age RPG about a commando, a four-armed dwarf, a female cyborg, and a metal-encased brain on a mission to track down stolen weapons.

SegaSoft Gets Hot

In case you haven't heard, SegaSoft wants to be on top of the heap where online gaming is concerned. The publisher has already spent millions on its HEAT game network infrastructure, and has just revealed details of the first games to take full advantage of the service. The most notable is the online-only 10Six, which is a vague reference to 1 million Internet gamers. That's right—SegaSoft is shooting for 1 million people playing simultaneously. The idea behind 10Six is that a rogue planet enters the solar system, setting off a land grab not seen since Oklahoma in the 19th century. Each player is given a parcel of territory to build up and defend. The kicker is that the game continues 24 hours a day whether you're around or not. Unless players install automatic defenses or get help from a friend, their camp is toast. The gameplay is a cross between Red Alert and Duke Nukem 3D. Look for 10Six around Christmas.

Early next year, SegaSoft will release Vigilance, a first-person action game that boasts some truly outstanding 3D features even without accelerator cards, although the company plans to enhance the game for "three 3D cards," and may use Direct3D as well. Early demos already show off impressive realism in light sources and curved geometry. Playing as part of a special forces peace-keeping force, up to four people can take part in the same missions, with possibly as many as

Skies is SegaSoft's all-3Dfx fantasy game.

continued on page 30

Time Warriors

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THE POWERVR REVOLUTIONARIES

INTERVIEW

DIVA LA REVOLUCIÓN.

Tomb Raider's fiery Lara Croft is one of the most recognized figures of the PowerVR™ Revolution. A confrontationalist, she has grown tired of the old 3D Order. With passion and anger, Lara has been relentlessly fanning the flames of revolutionary justice for gamers around the world.

WELCOME TO THE MOVEMENT. APPARENTLY, DISCOVERING ANCIENT TOMBS HAS FAILED TO SATISFY THE RADICAL HUNGERS THAT GNAW AT YOUR SOUL?

Lara Croft: My first passion will always be exploring ancient civilizations. But when I realized gamers were being kept down by inferior 3D technology, I went balistic. I'm busting my arse to get gamers the 3D experience they deserve.

SO THE BLAND 3D EXPERIENCE WAS BOUND TO PRODUCE A REVOLT?

L: Absolutely. But this is an armed struggle, love. And the weapon is not the Colt .45 in my hand. It's the PowerVR 3D technology that will topple the bloody awful 3D experience.

ARE YOU SAYING EVERYTHING ABOUT CONVENTIONAL 3D TECHNOLOGIES DESERVES TO PERISH—SHOVED OFF TO THE ASH HEAP OF OBSOLESCENCE?

L: Bloody right, mate. Gamers want 3D technology that liberates their experience. Like higher resolution. Higher frame rates. Effects that take them as close to reality as you can get.

LIBERATION SEEMS TO BE A CENTRAL THEME DRIVING THE MOVEMENT.

L: Look, if I could escape the suffocating arrogance of snooty British society, gamers could overthrow the forces trying to smash the PowerVR resistance. That's what pumps adrenaline through my body.

UM, DON'T TAKE THIS THE WRONG WAY LARA, BUT THAT'S SOME BODY.

L: Actually, you should see it at 800x600 resolution. I think you'd dig my aerial flips with realistic shadows.

WHEW, WELL, UH...SO LARA, THESE ARE EXCITING, TURBULENT TIMES. GAMERS AND GAME DEVELOPERS SEEM TO BE GETTING SWEPT UP IN THE PROMISE OF POWERVR.

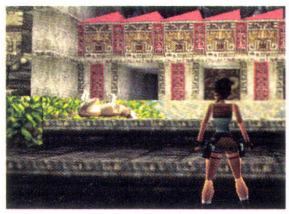
L: That's right. Our freedom fighters are developing games right now that are PowerVR Ready. Eidos, Kalisto, Shiny, Sega Entertainment, FASA, Activision, Core Design, Gremlin. All feverishly churning out PowerVR Ready titles, including my next adventure, Tomb Raider 2.

WOULD YOU SAY THE MOVEMENT IS OBSESSED WITH POWER?

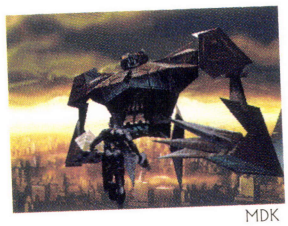
L: Of course, you twit. Frankly, we're not stopping until we have profoundly altered 3D reality for all gamers. And we will! Because we have finally seized the ultimate apparatus of real 3D power.

THE POWERVR TECHNOLOGY?

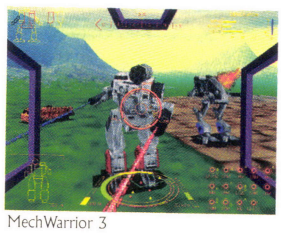
L: Yes. And with it, there will be no obstacles that can stand in the way of the mission of the PowerVR revolution: to produce the most realistic game experience imaginable. Now bugger off, I've got a battle to fight.



Tomb Raider



MDK



MechWarrior 3

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sponsors join in. Tournament rules and information on the rating system are posted at the site.

A $500 prize goes to the winner of a new Red Alert tournament.

Chessmaster Hits 55,000 Downloads

Headland Digital Media, the folks formerly known as Mindscape Online Publishing, reports that Chessmaster Online has clocked more than 55,000 downloads since last October. The chess game features chat, exporting of saved games, and "whisper" channels so observers can comment on games in progress.

Chessmaster Online

Microsoft Hosting A Monster Tournament

Microsoft is inviting Monster Truck Madness fans who use a graphics board with the Cirrus Logic Laguna 3D chipset to play in a summer tournament that will deliver a Ford Explorer to the best driver. Online racers can post their track scores through September, and the best times will be used to determine finalists. Video boards that use the Laguna 3D chipset include Creative's Graphics Blaster 3D and VideoLogic's GrafixStar 550. For more information, go to **www.microsoft.com/games/monster.**

Microsoft and Cirrus Logic want you online.

—George T. Chronis and Joe McCloud

COVERT OPS

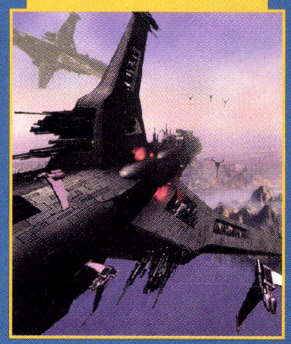
continued from page 23

16 people in non-mission LAN or online levels. A year from now, SegaSoft will release Skies, a fantasy adventure that reads like a combination of the movie *Barbarella* and Tomb Raider in an RPG, floating-island environment. Players can choose an avatar from an assortment of good and dark angels, dragons, griffins, demons, and the usual glut of fantasy characters.

A Pax on You

Despite being orphaned by Blizzard after last year's E3, Heliotrope and Pax Imperia II found a willing step-parent in T•HQ. There has been speculation that Blizzard didn't want extra competition for Starcraft, and may have felt the space-strategy category was already too crowded. That's Pax Imperia's gain: Although Pax Imperia: Eminent Domain bears a resemblance to its popular Mac forebear of four years ago, Heliotrope has built in many enhanced options, and from what we've seen, the interface has been significantly cleaned up and the imagery is striking. Ship designs are now completely open-ended, and planet development is much quicker. and easier. More devious diplomatic options are also in the mix. Expect support for 16 players via LAN and or modem; negotiation with online services such as TEN and Mplayer is still underway for Internet play. By the time you read this, the public beta should be up and running. For more info, visit **www.paximperia.com.**

Fans of Pax Imperia have been waiting a long time to raise new fleets for battle.



Orient Distress

With a reputation preceding it for good multimedia titles based on its TV programming, Discovery Channel Multimedia is jumping into the gaming wars. The Maryland-based producer is readying its Planet Explorer series of immersive games with two titles, Byzantine and Evolution, both of which should be ready for the Christmas season.

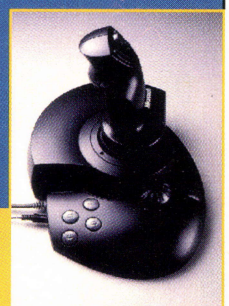
Byzantine, an adventure set in modern-day Istanbul, presents you with the mystery of a journalist friend who disappeared while tracking the theft of previously unknown antiquities. (Picture the old Orson Welles noir *The Third Man*, and you'll more or less have the idea.) A mix of video and rendered environments drives the story; Discovery crews filmed in Istanbul to get the detailed settings just right. (Some of the material will be used in *Intrigue in Istanbul*, a Discovery TV program airing October 19.) Moreover, some of the locations are experienced in "real" play, while others are accessed through a virtual-reality device you pick up. A nice feature comes via the game's Web site, **www.planetexplorer.com**, which will feature an associated Turkey-based mini-game, Sélam: The Secret Language, in six "episodes"—one per month leading up to the release of Byzantine.

Meanwhile, Evolution is yet another real-time strategy game, but with a twist—it takes place at the beginning of time. You'll be managing resources, but they're not the stuff of war; this time, they're linked with the development of mankind.

Microsoft Loves Feedback

Still considered a state secret in Redmond at press time, *PC Games* has nonetheless obtained a prototype of Microsoft's new SideWinder Force Feedback Pro joystick. Chairman Bill's hardware troops think force feedback is the next big thing in gaming; don't be surprised to see one of these babies in a software store near you this Christmas. We've already used it with a force-feedback demo of GT Interactive's TigerShark, and this stick looks—and feels—promising. Microsoft has also put together a software utility to help developers fine-tune force-feedback ports. With Microsoft in the game, expect to see a lot of games supporting this stick. We'll review it soon...

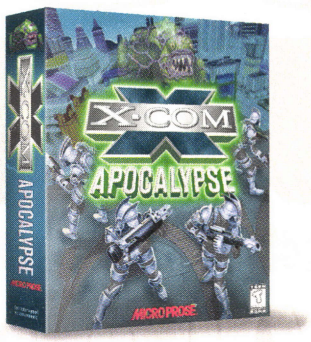
—George T. Chronis, Karen Jones, and Don St. John

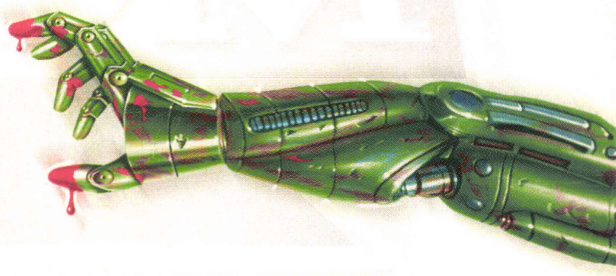


Microsoft wants to sell you a force-feedback joystick.

heroin
s & m
unfiltered cigs
binge drinking
creamed corn
one night stands

hell, what's left?





X-COM: APOCALYPSE

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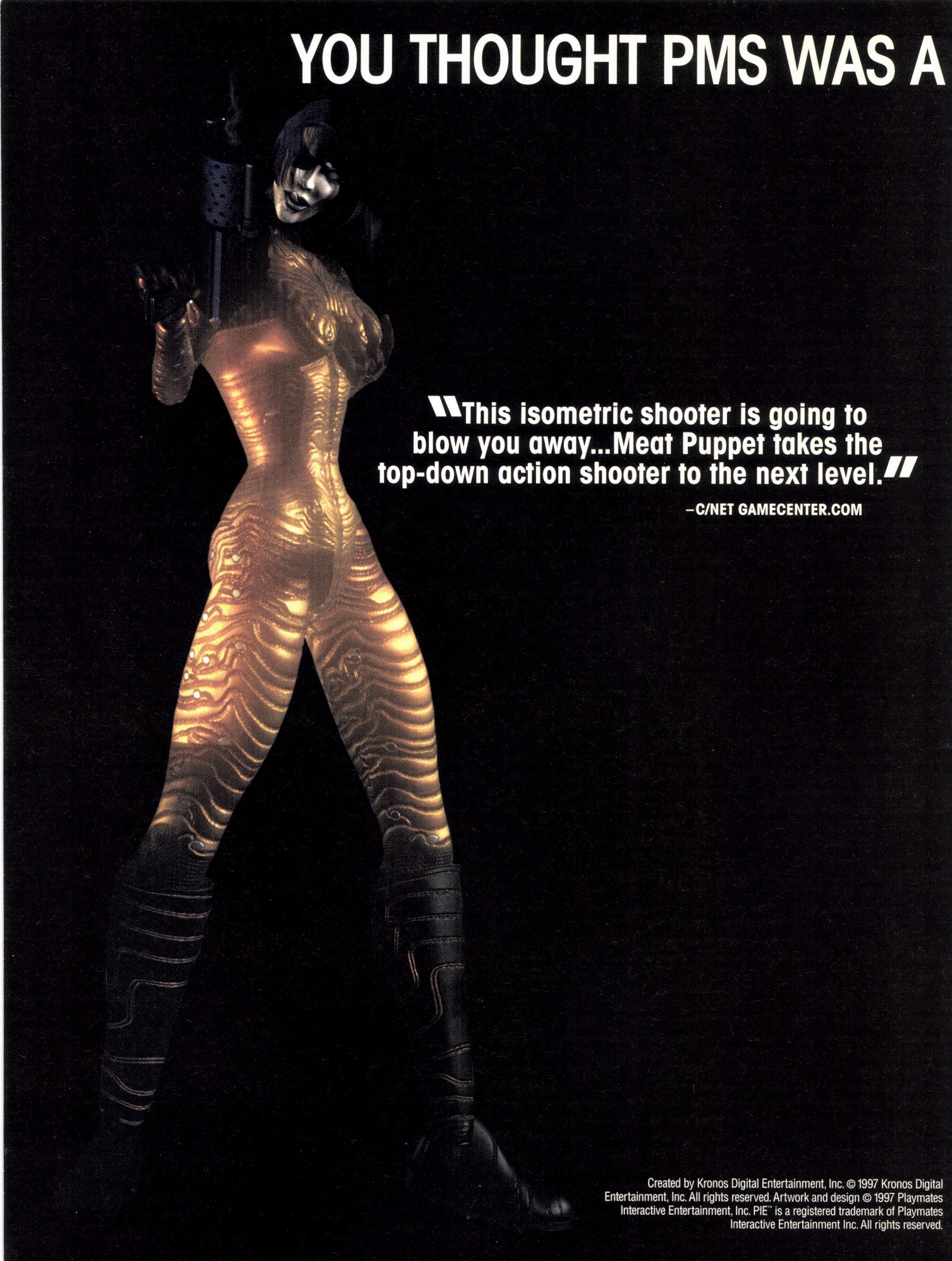
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–C/NET GAMECENTER.COM
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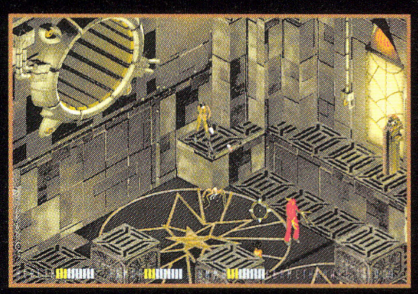

http://www.playmatestoys.com

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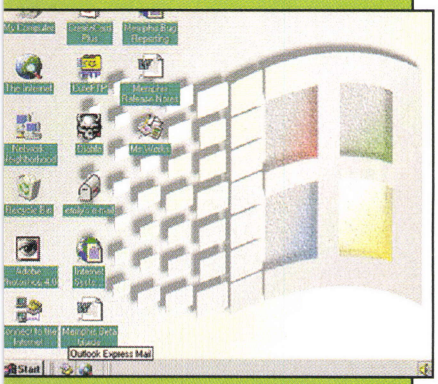
GAME BYTES

Windows Upgrade Delayed

Stock shares fell when Microsoft Corp. announced that the updated version of Windows 95 would be delayed until early 1998. The operating system, currently known as Windows 97, was expected to be released in the second half of this year. Microsoft plans to complete the upgrade by the end of this calendar year, "give or take a few months," said Robert Herbold, the company' s executive vice president and CEO, at the recent Internet Commerce Expo in Atlanta, Ga.



Software Company Sends in Troops

Mak Technologies has infiltrated the U.S. Marine Corps. The Marines have called for support from this Cambridge software task force to build a game that can be used in sophisticated military training (and can be modified for sale to computer gamers as well), to help offset development costs.

—Amy Crigger

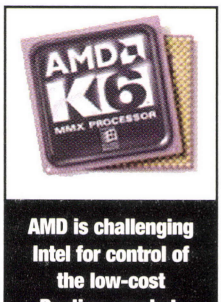
NEC has updated its PowerPlayer game Pentiums to MMX.

NEC Adds to the Power

A lot of you must be buying them, because NEC has just released the third generation of its game-tweaked MMX systems. Although P166s are getting a little old in the tooth for computer gaming, NEC is offering its PowerPlayer 3010 at that speed. Then there's the 3020, a 200MHz machine. Both come with a 16X IDE CD-ROM drive, 32MB of RAM, 256K of L2 cache, an ATI 3D Rage video card with 2MB of memory, and Diamond's Monster 3D accelerator with the 3Dfx chip. The systems don't stint on sound, with bundled AWE32 cards and 50-watt Advent speaker systems. Also in the package are a 33.6 modem, a ThrustMaster Top Gun joystick, twin Microsoft SideWinder gamepads, and a three-button Logitech Mouseman mouse. The game bundle includes Pod, Descent II: Destination Quarzton, VR Soccer, and TEN online software. The 3020 will set you back $2,599; the 3010 is $2,299.

AMD Wants In Your Game Machine

Gamers interested in Pentium Pro performance will soon see a wealth of low-cost systems based on AMD's new 32-bit K6 processor. Originally developed as the Nx686 by NexGen before AMD purchased that company last year, the K6 fits into the same Socket 7 processor slots used by today's Pentiums. The Pentium Pro's 64-bit footprint uses a much larger socket, which requires a unique and more expensive motherboard. AMD hopes to give computer-makers the opportunity to use existing parts and designs in creating super-fast systems. Like the Pentium Pro, the K6 uses RISC technology to speed processing through simpler operations. Initial reports indicate that a 233MHz K6 is as fast as a 200MHz Pentium Pro. If retailers buy in bulk, the 233MHz K6 costs around $60 less than a 200MHz Pentium Pro chip The K6 also has its own version of MMX on hand, whereas the Pentium Pro does not. Intel's successor to the Pentium Pro, the Pentium II, should be shipping as you read this, and will have MMX. As Intel phases out the Pentium processor, AMD hopes to convince computer-makers to use the K6 as a replacement rather than the Pentium II. AMD also offers 200MHz and 166MHz versions of the K6 for lower-cost systems.

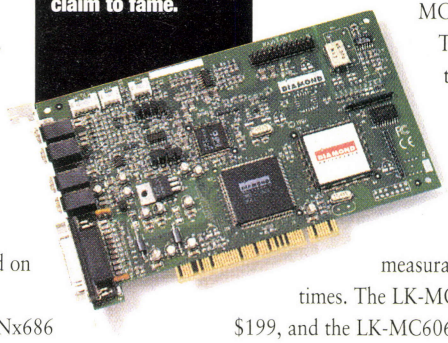


AMD is challenging Intel for control of the low-cost Pentium market.

Panasonic is releasing a screaming-fast 24X drive.

Warp-Speed 24X CD-ROM Drives

That's right, we said 24X. Panasonic's LK-MC686BP is a 24X EIDE/ATAPI drive and the LK-MC606BP is a 24X SCSI-2 model. That translates into maximum transfer rates of 4,104KB per second, and an average seek time between 85msec and 100msec. Still not enough to run a game solely from the CD, but it should measurably decrease installation times. The LK-MC686BP will set you back $199, and the LK-MC606BP goes for $209. Both carry a two-year warranty.



True 3D audio is the Monster Sound's big claim to fame.

3D Audio for the Masses

After months of teasing gamers and the game press, Diamond is finally shipping its Monster Sound audio accelerator. Using technology developed by Aureal, the Monster Sound PCI board is designed to work with Microsoft's new DirectSound3D audio API to deliver true channel separation. Most sound cards on the market actually use a trick called spatialization to make computer audio sound like it's 3D. Since it's a PCI card, the Monster Sound is capable of moving many more streams more swiftly than slower ISA sound cards. It also includes a high-speed joystick port to lessen CPU overhead, and quad-speaker outputs. The Monster Sound accelerator should street at $199. *—George T. Chronis*

Online-Game Connection

By Daniel Morris

As the online-gaming services emerge, *PC Games* will be keeping close tabs on the major players each month on this page.

Game Enablers

www.kali.net

Currently Available:
Any IPX-compatible game (Big Red Racing, Command & Conquer, Deadlock, Descent, Descent II, Diablo, Duke Nukem 3D, Master of Orion II, MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries, NetMech, Su-27 Flanker, Warcraft II, you name it)

Exclusives:
None

Upcoming:
Kali works with most new games that are IPX-compatible

Rates: $20 one-time fee

Subscribers: 100,000

www.teleport.com/~nbright

Currently Available:
Any IPX-compatible game

Exclusives:
None

Upcoming:
Kahn works with most new games that are IPX-compatible

Rates: $15 one-time fee

Subscribers: Not available

Gaming Services

www.gamesonline.com

Currently Available:
Billboard Live Music Trivia, Castles II, Darkness Falls, Descent Online, Rolemaster: Magestorm, Splatterball, Virtual Pool, Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness

Exclusives:
Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness

Upcoming:
Battlechess 4000, Dragon Dice, Rolemaster: Bladelands, Shattered Steel

Rates: $1.95/hr. with ads, $2.50/hr. ad-free

Subscribers: Not available

www.mplayer.com

Currently Available:
Battleship, Big Red Racing, C&C, C&C: Red Alert, Deadlock, MechWarrior 2, Panzer General, Quake, Risk, Scarab, Terminal Velocity, Warcraft, War Wind

Exclusives:
Q-Ball

Upcoming:
Chaos Overlords, Havoc, Monopoly, SimCity 2000, Star General

Rates: Free; Mplayer Plus: $29.95/yr. for access to special online tournaments and sponsored events

Subscribers: Over 20,000 paying subscribers

www.dwango.com

Currently Available:
Big Red Racing, Descent II, Doom, Doom II, Final Doom, Ultimate Doom, Duke Nukem 3D shareware, Heretic, Hexen, MechWarrior, Strife, Terminal Velocity, Warcraft

Exclusives:
None

Upcoming:
Not available

Rates: $7.95/mo., $19/10 hrs., $34/20 hrs., $59/40 hrs. (5 free hours at sign-up)

Subscribers: Not available

http://zone.com

Currently Available:
Backgammon, Bridge, Checkers, Chess, Close Combat, Golf 3.0, Hearts, Hellbender, Monster Truck Madness, Outlaws, Reversi, Spades, X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter

Exclusives:
Microsoft/LucasArts titles

Upcoming:
They're not saying, but we'd guess Jedi Knight

Rates: Free

Subscribers: Not available

www.ten.net

Currently Available:
C&C, C&C: Red Alert, Dark Sun: Crimson Sands, Deadlock, Diablo, Duke Nukem 3D and Atomic Edition, Master of Orion II, Necrodome, Panzer General, Quake, Terminal Velocity, Warcraft

Exclusives:
Dark Sun: Crimson Sands, Duke Nukem 3D

Upcoming:
Big Red Racing, Blood, CivNet, Confirmed Kill, EF2000, Falcon 4.0, Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games, NASCAR Racing 2, Prey, Shadow Warrior, SimCity 2000, Top Gun, Total Mayhem

Rates: Flat rate: $19.95/mo.; Hourly rate: $9.95/5 hrs. per mo., $1.95/each addtl. hr.

Subscribers: 30,000

www.ariesgames.com

Currently Available:
Air Warrior, Air Warrior II, Classic Card Games, Harpoon Online, Legends of Kesmai, Multiplayer BattleTech: Solaris, Online Casino, Stellar Emperor

Exclusives:
Jack Nicklaus 4

Upcoming:
Jack Nicklaus 4

Rates: No extra charge through AOL and CompuServe

Subscribers: Over 100,000 through AOL/CompuServe

WORTHY GAME URLS

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pcgamesletters@pcgames.com

Blues News
www.bluesnews.com

Braindead's Quake Page
www.rz.uni-frankfurt.de/~brunken/quake/qhome.htm

The Cistern
www.escape.ca/~lloyd/tomb

Diablo Katz Clan
www.digitalmall.net/katz

Duke Nukem 3D Home Page
www.naz.com/personal/jxurt/index1.htm

Games Domain
www.gamesdomain.com

Games Place
www.melis.com/gamesplace

GameZZZZ
www.angelfire.com/ri/rickslinks

House Steiner
www.housesteiner.com

Inferno
www.innercite.com/~mjones

Invincible Descent Links
www.KoolBear.com/Descent

Kyle Harmon's C&C Site
www.zymurgy.org/~kyle

Out-Post 17
www.gfalls.wednet.edu/~jbowen/starcraft

Ozone Games
www.mydesktop.com/game

Planet Quake
www.planetquake.com

Playzone
www.angelfire.com/pa/MaxBabin/index.htm

Redwood's Quake Page
http://redwood.com

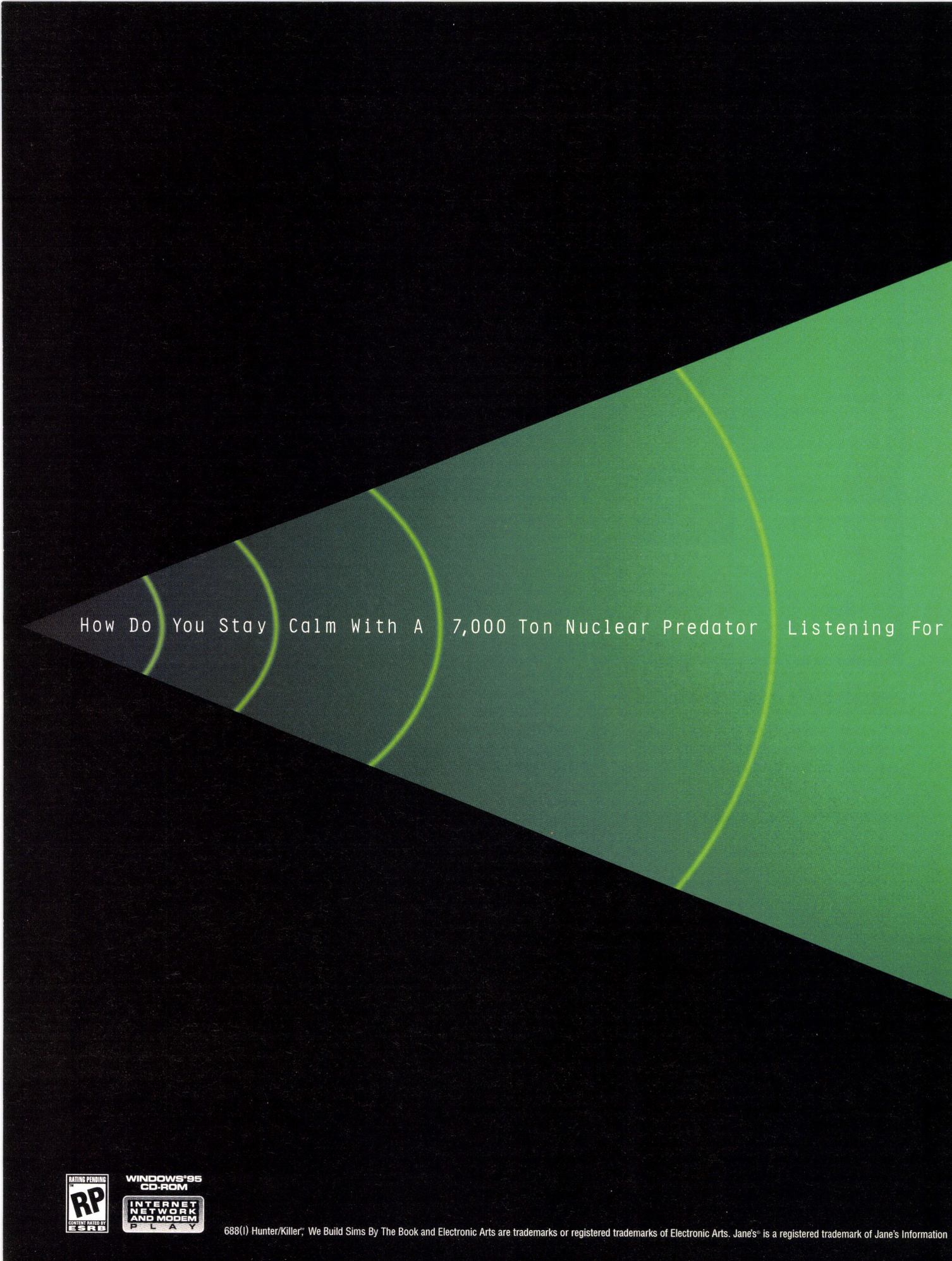
RPG-Net
http://stealth.nethosting.com

Shadows
www.starwars.com

Stomped
www.stomped.com

Unreal News Network
http://unn.gamedemo.com

Web RPG
www.webrpg.com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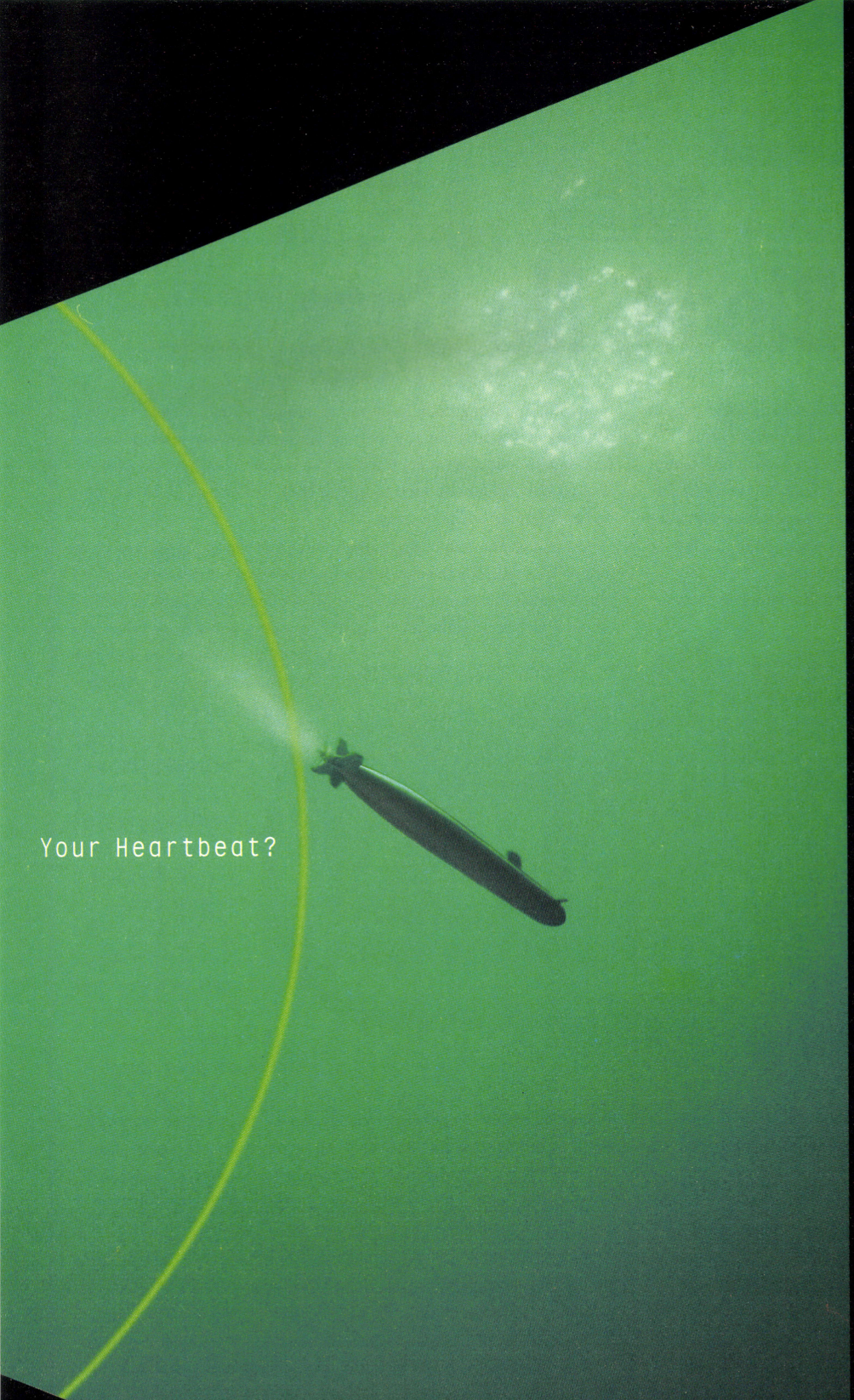

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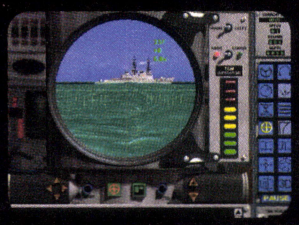

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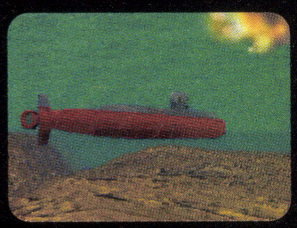

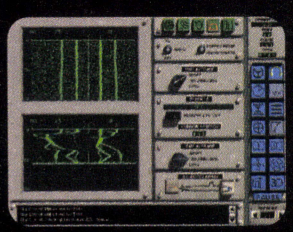

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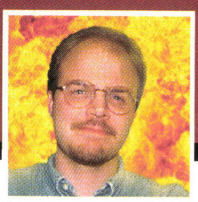


STEVE KLETT

"Making an excessively gory game is merely the laziest way for developers to appeal to the lowest common denominator and make a quick buck."

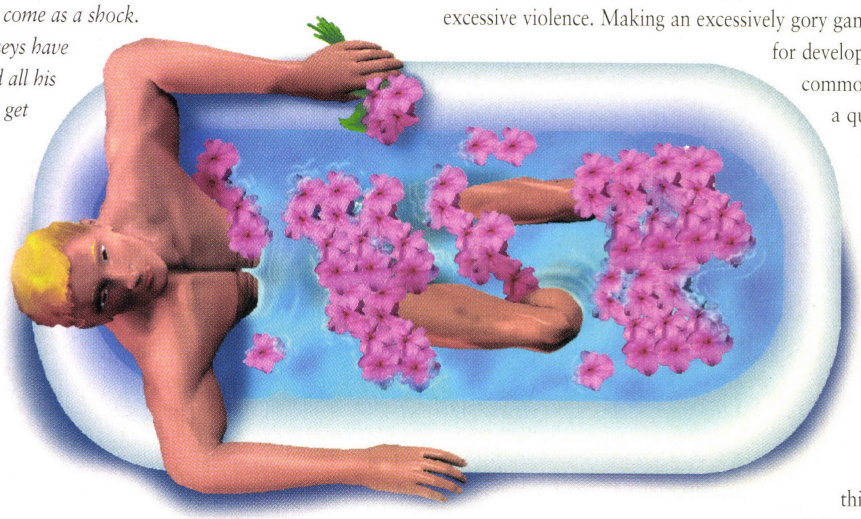
All Blood, No Guts

Warning: This column contains references to violence, gore, and sexual content in games. If you feel you're not mature enough to read responsibly, stop now and seek the guidance of a responsible adult.

Note to Parents: The above-mentioned references to said controversial material are not gratuitous—The Player is actually being (gasp!) serious for once—and it actually is safe to let younger minds read this column. In fact, with a little of your help, they may actually get something out of it.

Warning to Regular Readers of The Player: The following attempt at a somewhat moral stance may come as a shock.

Okay, The Player's attorneys have advised him that he's covered all his warning-label bases, and can get on with the show...



The Player is old enough to understand that there's a fundamental difference between gibbing someone with a quad rocket-launcher from point-blank range in a game and actually pulling a trigger on a human being (or any living thing, for that matter) in real life.

That said, it's been easy for him to dismiss the outrageous claims of parents, senators, and vice presidents' wives about the destructive effects of video games, computer games, music—in short, virtually any form of multimedia entertainment.

However, over the last few months, several little alarming pieces of evidence have surfaced that haven't reversed The Player's views on violence and sexual content in games, but have at least made him think.

It's taken a while, but he's beginning to think that game developers are indeed going way overboard with violence and gore in games—and one developer in particular is way over the line in its treatment of women. For the sake of fairness, The Player's not going to name any of the "offending" games; everyone knows them by now.

Developers aren't going too far with violence and non-PC behavior in games by including them in a given title—The Player will never say that. Like movies and books, computer entertainment software developers should have the right to include whatever subject matter they like. We don't have to play the games, just like we don't have to read a particular book or go to a certain movie.

Where developers—and more to the point, publishers—are missing the point is in making violence-for-the-sake-of-violence the driving force in their games and marketing campaigns.

It used to be that a strong story sold an adventure game, or that compelling gameplay or new advances in graphics and game engines sold action games. Now it seems that developers are focusing on out-goring each other, rather than out-developing each other, and games like I-76, Outlaws, and MDK are becoming too few and far between.

Games don't have to be graphically violent to make an impact on a player. Take I-76's subtle slump on the horn when you waste a driver with your pistol, Outlaws' story and challenge, or MDK's humorous treatment of its excessive violence. Making an excessively gory game is merely the laziest way for developers to appeal to the lowest common denominator and make a quick buck.

The suits responsible for ensuring that games bring in a healthy profit are all too happy to use the gore factor as the primary selling point for a new game.

And it's working—and will continue to work until we let them know we want something different.

Take the example of a certain exceedingly "bloody" title out now with an exceedingly bloody ad campaign. In fairness to the developer and distributor, they're only catering to what they think we as gamers want in a game—and they may be right. Either way, a title built on old technology and adding little new to the gaming world, other than excessive blood-splattering and bodies that pile up in a deathmatch, is getting a strong following.

Another upcoming first-person shooter, still in beta, offers a big advancement to the gaming world—not an unparalleled game engine, AI, or story, but the ability to shoot individual limbs off enemies. Shoot a baddie in the arm, and it flies off, leaving a splintered bone and spurting arterial spray in its wake.

Is this all the advancement left in the action-gaming world—new ways to eviscerate opponents?

The Player hopes not, and would caution developers against vying to be the Camel cigarette company of the game industry, enticing younger gamers with the "glamour" of gore. Because if they continue to do so, without offering advances in story, technology, and gameplay, they will eventually lose their audience. Right now, lots o' gore may be enough, but sooner or later, merely coming up with new splatter won't be sufficient to sell a game. It gets old in a hurry.

The Player welcomes contemplative and responsible constructive criticism at ThePlayer@pcgames.com.

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TOTAL ANNIHILATION'S 3D landscape is a revolution that demands deeper strategy and generates more realistic game play. Mobilize your forces and experience the new landscape of war!

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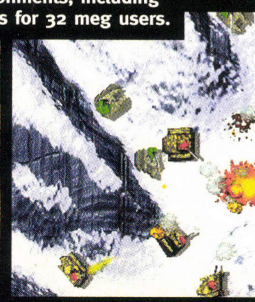
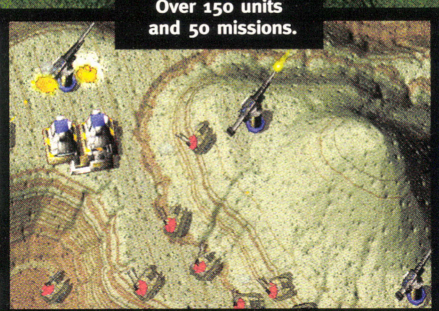
Designed for Microsoft Windows 95

a GT Interactive company

Giant 3D environments, including extra large maps for 32 meg users.





Over 150 units and 50 missions.

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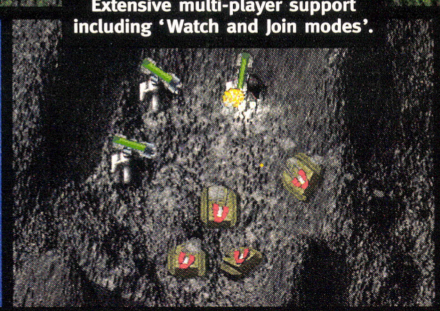
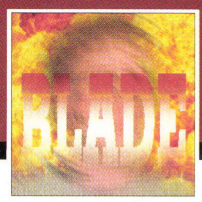


Extensive multi-player support including 'Watch and Join modes'.

THE OPPONENT



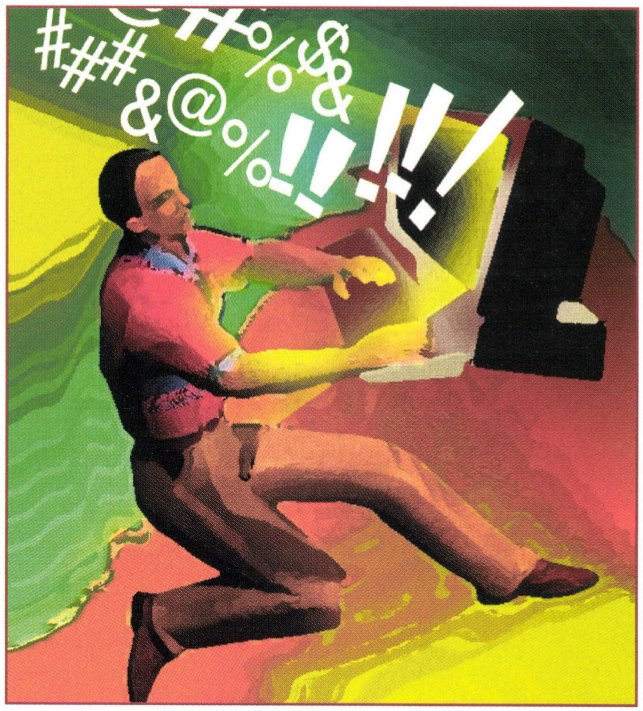
BLADE

"The Opponent is still far from convinced that the social element of online gaming communities is working. Why? Because they're plagued by a bunch of screamin' Idiots."

There's Just No Need for That

The Opponent has been lurking around the online services since they started beta-testing some months ago. In that time, he's seen them develop, change, change back, adjust and, most importantly, improve vastly. As a terminal cynic, he felt from the beginning that the social-interaction angle of online gaming—this whole "community of gamers" thing—needed to prove itself. Is a vibrant, dynamic "hangout" something that would appeal to the majority? This juror is still on the fence.

Several months later, The Opponent is still far from convinced that the social element of being in a community of gamers is working. The reason for this is tragically simple: The online gaming communities are plagued by a bunch of screamin' great Idiots.



Just watching the chat room messages scroll up the screen is something of a spectator sport in itself. People are constantly popping in and out of central chat rooms, into game rooms, into games, back out; the whole idea is that there will, at some point, be chatting between the dueling parties. This presents problems right off the bat: Throw people together in what is essentially an aggressive pursuit (be it straight-up gibfests or more cultured but equally destructive strategy-game onslaughts), and the testosterone levels rise. With this comes potentially irrational behavior and language.

"Netiquette" is a disappointing word to have added to our language, on the grounds that it assumes a difference in behavior acceptance levels from the standards perpetuated by our wonderful society. Why do we need to mention netiquette? Why can't we just assume that people populating these services will be under the same guidelines for acceptable behavior as they would if they were talking to these people face to face?

The Opponent blames the nickname, the nom de plume, the alter ego. For those who want to be foul-mouthed, wise-ass intimidators, all level of responsibility for their actions is removed. Okay, the services can kick out persistent offenders, but how often does that really happen? Not nearly enough. Individuals can mute the unruly and vulgar, but why should well-meaning, enthusiastic gamers, there for a chat and a game, have to deal with these cretins?

This is not to condone any censorship by the services, but a greater degree of checking into the comments passing through the groups would be a good start, with whispered warnings to offenders and then removal from the system should they ignore these warnings. Nobody else needs to be brought into the removal; it can all be done in the background of the main chat, allowing the majority to get on with their fun stuff and not allowing The Idiot his 15 minutes of tarnished fame.

It would be easy to accept bad behavior as just a symptom of a greater social problem, as kids in particular show little or no respect for the views, wishes, and concerns of those around them. One parent, enjoying a quick chat and a Quake deathmatch on TEN while the kids were in bed, suggested to an ignorant punk spewing various foul-mouthed statements that he ought to stop. This guy had no personal problem with profanity, "but my kids often use this service and I don't want them seeing this kind of stuff." The response? Due to good taste, it can't be printed.

For me, that Idiot should have been kicked out instantly. No excuses. No appeals. No nothing. Everyone in there would have been overjoyed.

Banter between combatants is great fun, even when it's of the simple "you suck" variety. When followed by a jovial comment, and possibly a hint on how not to suck so bad next time, the chat becomes far more entertaining and useful and creates a genuinely friendly atmosphere.

All this is not to say that the online services are wracked with a behavior problem. They aren't, and The Opponent has enjoyed countless illuminating chats with fellow gamers. But there does seem to be at least one Idiot in every chat room he's been in. The point is for those Idiots out there (you know who you are) to be more responsible. Certainly things can get frustrating when connections fail, lag ruins your score, or you simply get schooled by a better player, but as with the rest of life in a civilized community, there are more suitable alternatives to a torrent of foul-mouthed abuse, and you're more likely to get help for your problems if you ask politely.

Finally, in an open message to the entire online community, those with Caps Lock permanently on: STOP SHOUTING!

The Opponent can be found having pleasant conversations with those who aren't Idiots on all the online services under the nom de plume PCG_Blade. Direct comments to blade@pcgames.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN W. FLEURY

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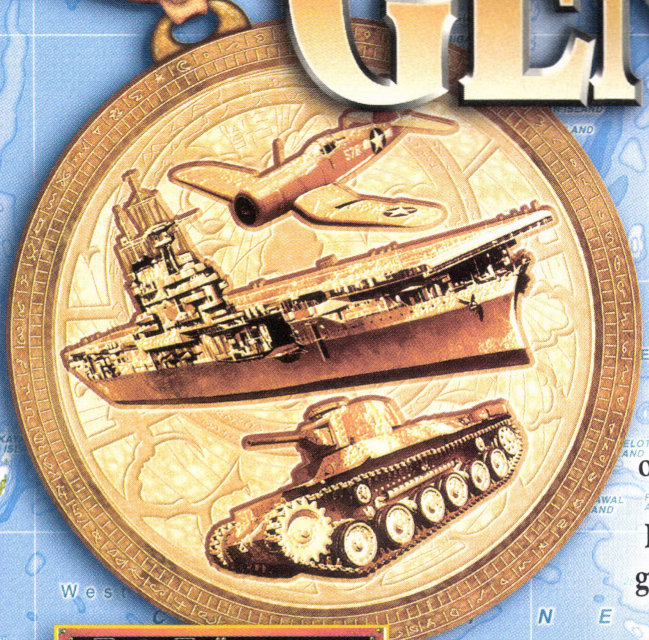

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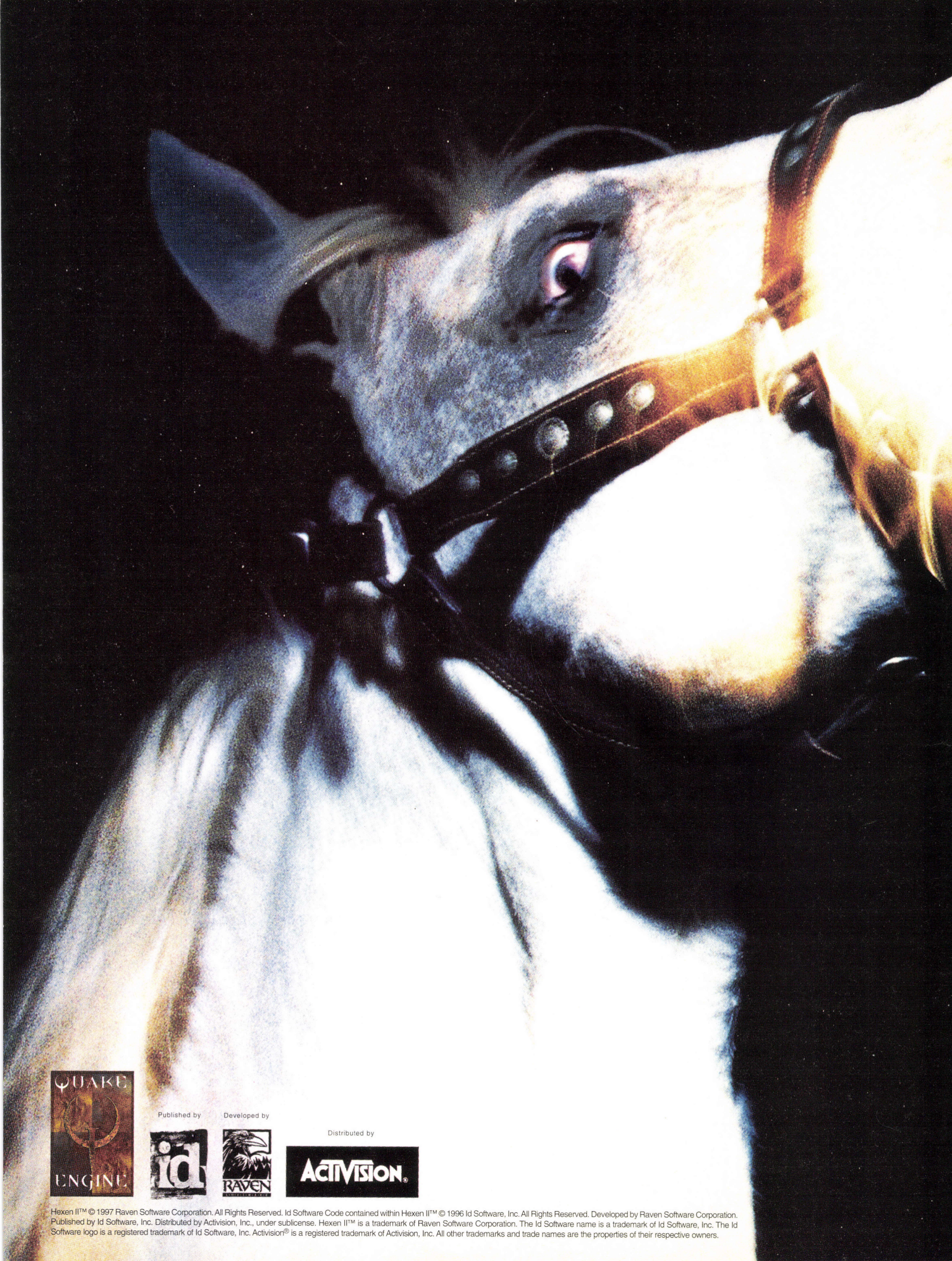

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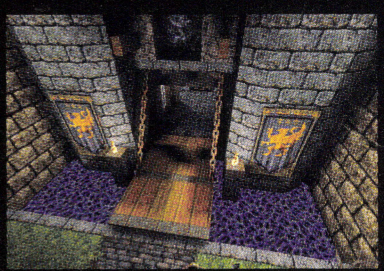

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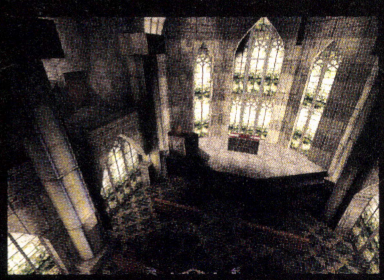

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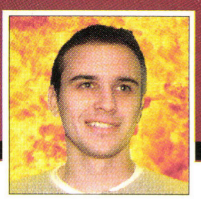


Daniel Morris

If more women are buying games, why are most games still aimed at men? *PC Games'* own Daniel Morris kicks off our new guest column with a look at this neglected audience.

It's a Man's World

Marlin Perkins—you remember, the Mutual of Omaha nature-show guy—never chased as rare or elusive a creature as a woman in the games section of a computer store. Right? Isn't the phenomenon rare enough that it warrants comment when it happens?

"Hey, is that a girl looking at the games?"

"Yeah...you know what? It is! She must be checking out Myst."

The preceding is just more of the hyperbole that a recent study by the Interactive Digital Software Association will hopefully help dispel, thanks to the availability of statistics that show women play a much larger role in influencing the purchase of PC games than was ever previously acknowledged.

According to the survey, conducted last year on behalf of a wide consortium of major software companies that includes gaming giants, women influence nearly half of all PC game purchases. In fact, about 40 percent of actual game purchases are made by females. And a title that went completely unnoticed by any gaming magazine—Mattel's Barbie Fashion Designer—beat out a raft of A-List games for a coveted spot as one of the 10 best-selling CD-ROMs of 1996.

How could this be? Surely we'd know if women were a driving force in the decision to buy half of all games sold. Right?

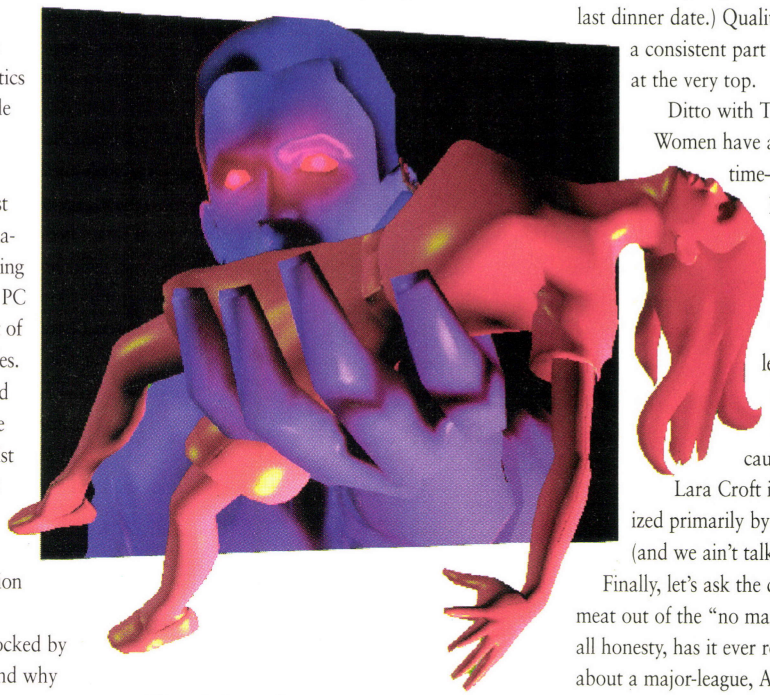
Don't bet the farm on it. We're as shocked by the figures as the game publishers are. And why shouldn't we be?

So dead set are we in the boys'-club mentality that we've neglected some basic facts. Namely, women like to have fun, too. Hell, they even like to play Quake (as a visit to the Web sites of the Net's several all-female clans will attest). Women go to the movies. Women buy records. Women read. In short, women like to be entertained. Is this such a groundbreaking notion?

Well, when it comes to PC gaming, the answer is yes.

Games are for guys; more specifically, the A-List games released each month are heavily male-oriented, with marketing drives aimed specifically at the XY chromosome pair. Women are the butt of frequent jokes in game advertising, but rarely the intended audience.

This condescension seeps into the games themselves—which wouldn't matter, perhaps, except that people in the gaming industry then cry on each other's shoulders because games haven't broken through as a mainstream form of mass entertainment. Could the juvenile attitude toward half of the mainstream audience have anything to do with this?



The rule is to relegate women to embarrassingly marginal roles in games. They are generally:

(1) Computerized readout voices.
(2) Asian martial artists.
(3) Murder victims.
(4) Poker sluts.
(5) Alien breeding stock.

An important note: The industry's mistake is not exclusion. It is lack of inclusion.

This isn't about larger societal contexts; it's about the cold, hard dollar. By neglecting half the populace's desire to be entertained, the gaming industry is flushing a ton of money away. Companies argue that the principal, hardcore audience of college-aged young studs will doom to commercial failure any game that may interest women.

The film, music, and publishing industries show us that it doesn't have to be that way. Many motion pictures succeed quite marvelously at the box office by appealing expressly to women. (Add revenue from guys dragged along on dates—is there room for "date" games as well as date movies? Well, why not? I spent 70 bucks on my last dinner date.) Quality female-oriented fiction is a consistent part of the bestseller list, often at the very top.

Ditto with TV. Ditto with albums. Women have as much disposable leisure time—and cash—as men, and have proved again and again that they're happy to spend it on entertainment geared to their tastes. The new trend in female lead characters is ostensibly a step in the right direction, but so far, it's hardly cause for enthusiasm. Sure, Lara Croft is a gal, but she's characterized primarily by the plentiful pair she packs (and we ain't talking about Uzis).

Finally, let's ask the question that makes mincemeat out of the "no market for women" theory: In all honesty, has it ever really been tried? I'm talking about a major-league, A-List marketing push for a game designed with both guys and gals in mind.

The answer is no—and yet Barbie Fashion Designer was one of the best-selling software titles of the year. Snicker all you want, but the wise publisher would do well to acknowledge that females are willing to buy products designed with them in mind; and that includes Mom, and College Student, and Little Girl with her dolls. Barbie may not be the embodiment of a women's revolution in gaming, but she will likely be remembered as the vanguard.

Let's hope so. There's a lot of fun yet to be had, and a lot of money yet to be made. As long as those two factors exist, the wait shouldn't be long.

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Creating Worlds

By Rob Smith

Origin's corporate tagline has never been more appropriate than for its latest venture, Ultima Online. Led by the "legendary" Lord British (aka Origin head Richard Garriott), Origin is putting the final touches on a role-playing environment that aims to model a real world in amazing detail—complete with dungeons, dragons, and quests. PC Games paid a visit to Origin's Austin offices to take a look at the new frontier of online PC gaming, in beta testing now. What we discovered was truly amazing...

Is the world of online gaming about to change? If Origin has its way with the massive fantasy role-playing universe of Ultima Online, it sure is.

"Ultima Online is going to be a very different online experience—much more of a social product. It's a society, in our eyes," says Richard Garriott, executive producer of the Ultima Online project. "People can live out complete lives in a variety of ways, with the real world simulated as accurately as possible."

Is this a game? If so, is it going to be any fun? Ultima Online is certainly an ambitious project, begun in earnest two years ago when Garriott recognized the suitability of the Ultima universe for creating a remarkably accessible, realistic role-playing environment (a concept that's been kicking around Origin for some six years). As Origin's publisher, Electronic Arts, considered the best angle from which to attack the burgeoning online market, Garriott asked for $250,000 and 6 months to get a working model in order. This pre-test was completed a year ago; EA saw the results and instantly backed the project to the tune of $2 million. Since then, the development team has grown from just 2 to more than 40.

In a nutshell, Ultima Online will be a real-time, real-cause and real-effect universe in which the players make the story, guided along the way by both the underlying plotlines and, more importantly, the dynamics of a massively involved game engine. So how does this philosophy of creating a realistic world come about in reality?

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THE STORY

Along with project director Starr Long, Garriott has conceived a detailed story that takes place in a separate timeline from the "cardinal" Ultimas—the game series I through VIII. "This allows us to take bits out of the Ultima series and use them in this new environment," Long says. Despite a broad story that will develop as the players integrate themselves in the environment and create their own history, there is an underlying plot involving Lord British and his philosophical antagonist Blackthorne (Long's character). The game's cinematic opening sequence reintroduces a famed Ultima adversary, the evil wizard Mondain, and the shattering of the Gem of Immortality. This gives a very subtle precursor to some of the detailed world-changing events that will occur, and also explains how multiple parallel Britannias can exist (see "The Server and Security," below).

The social nature of Ultima Online is reflected by this genial host.

To keep players informed of important events from around the world, and to introduce the story developments as they occur, there will be newspapers available to everyone. Events of national significance will be broadcast through a central, Origin-controlled newspaper, *The Town Cryer*, and journalism for players in the fantasy role of bards is another method of keeping the news spread on a more localized basis. "Essentially, they are acting as town criers on a worldwide scale," Garriott explains, "but they will never mention any game commands or imply that you are on a computer. This is reality, not a game."

Garriott's "reality" takes place on a massive scale. The new world map is bigger than all the other Ultimas combined; a walk from north to south, without stopping or engaging any other characters, will take 8 to 10 hours. "You could play for months and still not see all of the world, especially if you choose the non-adventuring lifestyle and remain in one city," Garriott says. "But the world will still be there in its varied form should you decide that it's time to hit the road."

A "resource bank" controls the appearance and varied actions of non-player characters, or NPCs (computer-controlled characters in towns as well as the monsters that inhabit the wilderness). For instance, a dragon appears, summoned by the resource bank. Priority one for the dragon is to find shelter. It discovers a cave populated by monsters, kills them, and moves in (there's no need for any real players to be aware of or see any of this; the world acts through natural resolutions all on its own). The dragon then gets hungry and looks for food. Unfortunately, players based in the local town have wiped out the local sheep and deer population. The dragon, by now really famished, heads for the town and scarfs a healthy plate of locals to satiate his hunger. Players heading to this town will find the locals somewhat miffed by this and put a price on the dragon's head, thus setting quests for the players in a very dynamic fashion.

With more than 50 monster and creature types ranging from demons and elementals to cows and chickens, this resource bank is going to be quite busy maintaining the flow of the developing world. Living creatures aren't the only things monitored, either. Artifacts, including some rare items brought in from the Ultima mythos, will pop up occasionally, and even standard equipment like a knife has a rarity value that is tracked and adjusted by the resource bank.

Balance between the resource engine and the actions of real-time players is a key—but as yet untested—element of the Ultima Online game world, and a feature that Garriott recognizes as vital to the successful growth of the environment. "Things could go wrong," he admits, "but balance is one of the key issues to be resolved in the beta test—how the resource system reacts to the players." The game engine has been designed to effectively run itself in the dynamic way described, "but while it is conceived to run itself, we will have 6

This siege by a daemon is an all-too-likely problem.

gamesmasters monitoring events 24 hours a day to ensure that the balance does remain even." This will also allow for a limited check on etiquette. "The only thing we want to restrict is anti-social behavior," Garriott says, and in a game steeped in the need for social interaction, true gamers can only hope that the GMs aren't called on too often. But there will always be one when you need one.

CHARACTER CREATION

Ultima Online is a skill-based system, so there are no classes as such—just specializations, depending on which skills you choose to practice. From the outset, when you select your character's sex and garb (which will be compulsory despite an early alpha test's tendency to cause characters to run around naked!), the massive individualizing process begins. Basic stats of strength, dexterity, and intelligence will determine bonuses for each of the 30-plus skills you can practice. These include alchemy, arms lore, begging, healing, cooking, and even taming animals—certainly enough options to supply a well-prepared adventuring party with the ability to survive in a treacherous wilderness.

Supplementing these skills is magic. Eight circles of magic formulate the strata of thaumaturgic learning. The history of the cardinal Ultimas sets the backstory for requiring magic practitioners to use "reagents" to create spells. Mages may need any of nine different reagents, including Nightshade, Garlic, Ginseng, and Spider's Silk, for spell-casting. Early-level spells such as Night Sight require just two reagents, while eighth-circle spells such as the powerful Earthquake, Resurrection, or Summoning of Major Monster spells may require four reagents—all of which cost money.

As a lone adventurer, you may see the wilderness as a dangerous place, but it's also a source of wealth and opportunity. A mercenary band can earn an honest living protecting merchants. Bounty hunters can act as law enforcement outside the confines of the towns. How about bards? Buy a blank book and fill the pages with the tales of a particular adventuring group whom the bard may follow; this will earn you enough to pay for upkeep when the tales are recounted in village taverns.

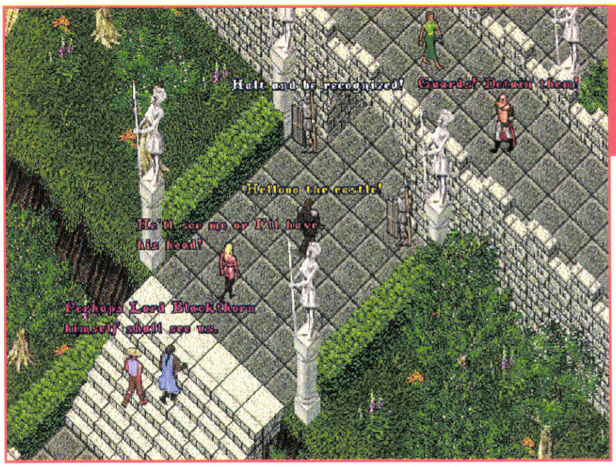
"We predict that around 20 percent of players will choose a lifestyle that is not a traditional hack-and-slash adventuring type," Garriott says with an enthusiasm that indicates that the higher this percentage, the better the development of the evolving world. "There are guilds for everything from bards to merchants. One formed immediately with the single goal of assassinating Lord British, and then one formed to protect him. It was the same for Starr's character, Blackthorne."

The community spirit is enhanced by the opportunity to do such mundane things as buy a house. How? Head to a Realtor, decide where you want the house built, pay the necessary fee, and building begins. Then how about furnishing it? For that added touch of domestication, you can even add a pet; cats will stay in the house, but a dog will follow you around and even go adventuring. Houses also serve as storage places for your worldly belongings, and while a server-controlled bank is going to be more secure—there's a whole bunch of thieves' guilds already in existence—it'll be pretty neat to hang out at your own pad after a heavy spell down a local dungeon. (Dungeons add even more floor space to the estimated 5 to 6 million square feet of land to wander.) The game engine's persistence means your possessions will be there waiting for you when you return to the game after an absence, unless thieves have broken in and stolen them.

SOCIAL INTERACTION AND ETIQUETTE

This concept of living a life within a game is the backbone of the whole Ultima Online development. "A virtual Renaissance Festival—that's really what it is," says Garriott, who is somewhat legendary for his own festivals, especially the traditional Halloween party at his custom-designed house. "This is an opportunity to become a part of that and then act in it.

"Most games with multiplayer components are combat-based," Garriott asserts. "Not so with Ultima Online; it's a very different, personalized experience, very social. The automation of the natural world is something that we're very proud of. This re-creation allows us to solve the problems of the world in a very real fashion." Living by the sword is certainly one way to exist in Britannia, and will no doubt be the choice of many, but there are other options.



Social, maybe, but you're not passing these ramparts without a good going-over.

Social interaction is key, not only with other players, but also with the game's NPCs. To best facilitate communication, each character's words will appear above his or her head in a chosen color and font, rather than having a jumbled chat box somewhere on the screen. This will allow several people to be onscreen at once and still be able to follow each other's conversations. NPCs, controlled by the resource bank, will be following events dynamically in their area and responding accordingly. These distinctions will even go so far as to include regional, geographic

Even death is a social event as friends mourn a lost comrade.

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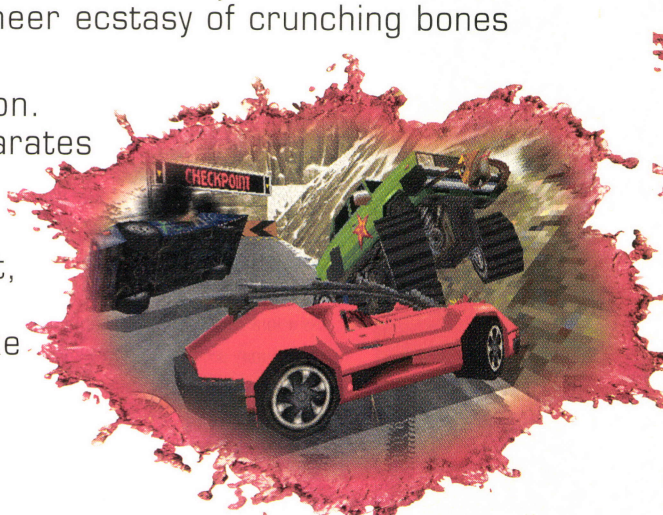

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THE HISTORY OF ULTIMA

Since 1979, the Ultima universe, in its various guises and developments, has been hooking gamers with its depth and opportunity for epic adventure. It began with a straightforward conflict with an evil wizard, but by installment four, the appearance of the legendary Avatar pointed the games in a new direction of virtue. And the story still continues...

Ultima I–III: The Age of Darkness

- **Ultima I: The First Age of Darkness** Cross four lands, through time and space, in a quest to defeat the evil wizard Mondain.
- **Ultima II: The Revenge of the Enchantress** Defeat Mondain's apprentice, Minax. A past and future Earth (not the original setting of Sosaria) incorporates futuristic technology with fantasy settings.
- **Ultima III: Exodus** Travel through Sosaria and the lost continent of Ambrosia to defeat the super-computer Exodus.

Ultima IV–VI: The Age of Enlightenment

- **Ultima IV: The Quest of the Avatar** In Britannia, ruled by Lord British, you become the fabled Avatar and embark on a quest to discover the way of Virtue. (See this month's PC Games.exe for the *full game*.)
- **Ultima V: Warriors of Destiny** Lord British is being held prisoner in the Underworld by the powerful Shadowlords. Through their influence, Blackthorne seizes control of Britannia, and the Avatar must fight the good fight.
- **Ultima VI: The False Prophet** Gargoyles are terrorizing the land. The Avatar must free the Shrines of Virtue and the rest of the world from this new evil.

Ultima VII–IX: The Guardian Trilogy

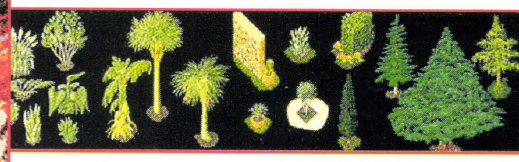
- **Ultima VII: The Black Gate** The Avatar returns to Britannia to find a strange group called The Fellowship trying to persuade the inhabitants of Britannia to stray from the path of Virtue, in favor of the Triad of Inner Strength. The Guardian is somehow connected.
- **Ultima VII, Part Two Serpent Isle** Trapped on Britannia by the destruction of the Black Gate, the Avatar must prevent The Guardian's reappearance on Serpent Isle.
- **Ultima VIII: Pagan** There's a new island to explore as the Guardian dumps you in a place without friends. There are no characters from the previous games, so it's a new exploration. Ultima VIII came with an add-on speech pack to add flavor to the Avatar's conversations with the locals.
- **Ultima IX: Ascension** Work currently halted as Origin crams to finish Ultima Online. Scheduled release is now late '98 or even '99.

Other Ultimas

- **Ultima Underworld I: The Stygian Abyss**
- **Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds**
- **Worlds of Ultima I: The Savage Empire**
- **Worlds of Ultima II: Martian Dreams**

differences both in appearance and style of conversation. Thus, traveling from town to town throughout Britannia unearths its own adventure simply through the variations in attitude and style of the characters you meet.

Of course, if you upset some locals, the guards may have something to say about your visit to town. Guards are NPCs who will police larger towns, and they will also have a memory—so if you're committing crimes out in the wilderness, don't think that it won't get back to the authorities. It will, and you'll be run out of town. Don't argue, either: these guards are really tough. Killing one is considered a heinous crime, and will affect the way all NPCs respond to you.



THE SERVER AND SECURITY

Latency is a key issue with any online game, but it's something the Ultima Online crew has been very careful to assess. "From day one, this was an Internet game, and we designed it with that in mind," Long says. "The client software knows the layout of the world, but not where the dynamic objects are [the ones created and controlled by the resource bank and stored on the server], so you can go for several moves without requiring a server update."

According to Long, this means that you could have up to a 500-millisecond ping (which is unplayable for action games such as Quake) without degrading play. In combat, there are no rapid sword swings controlled by manic mouse clicks. Instead, you select a target and the server uses skill scores to resolve the clash, so there is no advantage for faster connections.

The server setup is certainly a key feature in Ultima Online's armory. 5400MHz of processing power, 3456MB of RAM, and 66GB of storage space spread across 27 Pentium Pro 200s (with 3 for backup) serves as the backbone of the system. This distributed-server model helps ensure that a server doesn't crash due to the sheer number of players in any one area. So,

should Lord British wish to address the nation, and all the players gather in one area, there won't be a slowdown. That's an impressive feat, considering that the game world is designed to accommodate as many as 3,000 players at once (compared, for example, with the maximum of 200 in 3DO's Meridian 59).

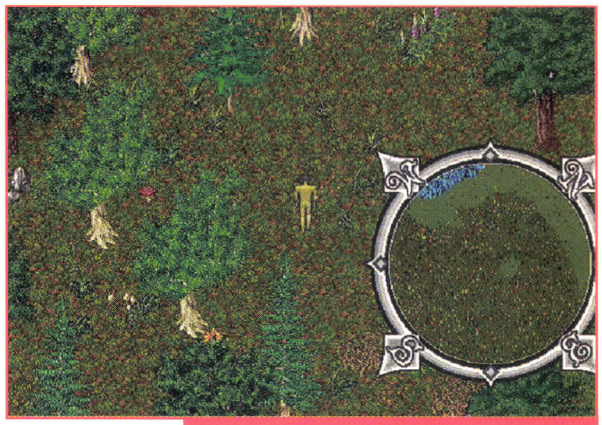
Should that number be exceeded by the retail-box sales (Origin assumes 2,000 to 3,000 players online at any one time for every 50,000 units sold), parallel Britannias will come into being and run in their own sweet way, with players in those worlds directing events. Curiously, through an as-yet-unspecified method, players will be able to travel between the different play worlds, possibly through the use of an in-game "portal" spell or something similar. It will certainly be fascinating to watch how the parallel universes evolve—and if you don't like the way a world's politics are shaping, you can just bail to another world.

Considering the diversity of Britannia's environments, powerful servers are key as well. Movement through the server will also be seamless—you won't notice the hop from one server to another when you open and then step through a door. While practicalities such as clothing requirements in colder climes and the need to eat have been removed for the sake of gameplay, different weather conditions will exist to offer plenty of options and new experiences.

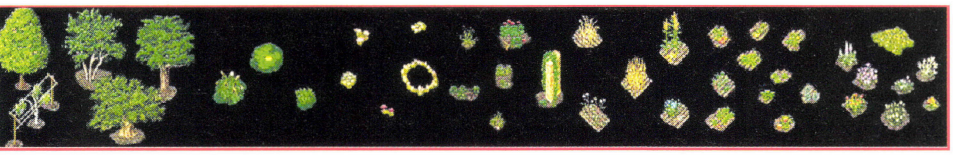
Origin has also addressed hacking and cheating possibilities from the beginning. For starters, your Ultima Online character will be saved on Origin's secure servers—unlike Diablo, for example. "We know that people will try to hack the system, but we're pretty sure that we're secure," Garriott says. "In fact, during the beta we're kind of hoping that some people try, just so that we can judge the success of our protection." The information for the game stored on your own machine will actually be fairly minimal, and because the server controls the game, it automatically checks and then fixes any anomalies. So, for example, if you manage to hack your character to boost all his skills, the server will recognize that something's wrong and fix it on the fly. Take that, cheaters!

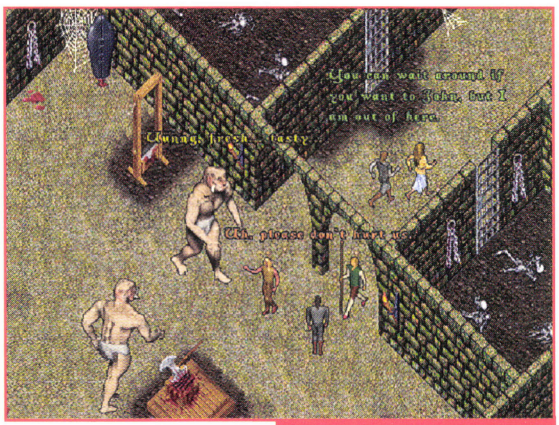
The retail, boxed Ultima Online will come with a cloth map of Britannia for reference, and the disc will be packed with some 400MB of art and music. While the client software for the server connection is a relatively small file, the art that gives the world its variety and flavor will be stored on the CD, which also saves on download time.

Origin hasn't confirmed a final business



The inset map helps you find your way.





Fe, fi, fo, fum...

You can even try out your favorite pick-up lines.

ULTIMA WEB SITES

World of Ultima
http://www.emanon.net/~redjr/world_of_ultima/

Ultima theme
http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/1769/uindx.html

Worlds of Origin (fan-club site)
http://www.bestware.net/whisper/woo/

Ultima Dragons Internet Chapter (loads of info on the Ultimas)
http://www.udic.org/

Dragon Press Ultima fan fiction
http://crash.ihug.co.nz/~charlton/andrew/fanfic/

The Bard's Library (music files)
http://www.cybernetex.com/ultima/

Random site plus links
http://www.bridge.net/~psycho/ultima.html

General Ultima information
http://www.users.interport.net/~marlowe/

model, but it looks likely that after the retail purchase, the company will charge a nominal fee to play online. The subject has caused debates to rage at the Origin offices, but because the game is online-only, it has to be assumed that most of the buyers will be eager to get online and join in, and willing to pay for the privilege.

MAKING HISTORY

Ultima Online is clearly meant to change the scope of gaming—online and elsewhere. Anyone who has ever yearned for a role-playing experience to match paper-and-pencil games, or who was frustrated by the AI restrictions of the evolving computer RPGs, is in for a treat. The essence of Ultima Online is to create the building blocks for a world, and let the imaginations, hopes, ideals, dreams, and attitudes of the players shape that world. Britannia has history and events that will impact everyone, but there is a daily life to be lived as well, be it in the rugged wilderness or the thronging streets of its cities.

"THE GAME WILL APPEAL TO HARDCORE GAMERS WANTING THEIR FILL OF ADVENTURE AND EXCITEMENT," SAYS GARRIOTT, "BUT IT'S ALSO A LOT BROADER IN ITS APPEAL. YOU DON'T NEED TO BE A MACHO FIGHTER TO HAVE A GOOD TIME; YOU JUST NEED AN IMAGINATION."

The public beta test, for which 30,000 people paid $2 for the CD, should be up and running (and may possibly be over) by the time you read this. For those testers who will lose their characters when the test ends, it will be just a taste to whet the appetite. In a burgeoning world of online and multiplayer gaming, Origin has taken the Ultima setting, with its history through the computer-gaming ages, and thrust it to the forefront of technology.

Ultima Online could well be the future of computer gaming. Origin is aiming to build something very special, with an appeal that will transcend the typical hardcore gamer used to frying foes with rockets. Sure, the action's going to be there in abundance, but it's the other gamers and what they do that Ultima's creators think will make Britannia so vibrant; the social interaction—the chat, the hanging out, the real role-playing.

And addictive? There will no doubt be many who live, eat, breathe, and try to rule Britannia. ■

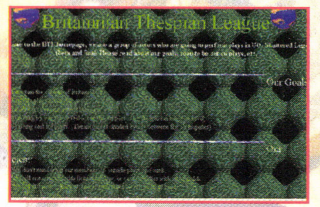
ULTIMA GUILDS

Ultima Online has enjoyed a significant amount of online coverage, as the legions of fans of the cardinal Ultimas get jumpy with excitement over the prospects for this online variant. The most obvious example of this is the formation of guilds. Ever since the first details of Ultima Online's open-ended role-playing format were released some time ago, guilds have been springing up. Recognizing the power of the Web fans' interest, Origin's Ultima Web developers have allotted space at the *www.owo.com* site to give these guilds prominent mention, providing links to their home pages.

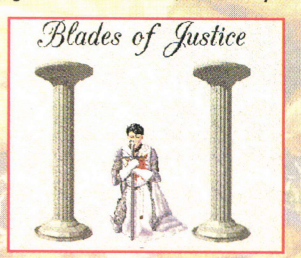
At press time, 328 guilds had been registered, with more requests flooding in. As a result, Origin is now accepting applications for new guild status only on the first three days of each month. With a guild logo, a Guild Master, an e-mail address, and a Web site for followers to visit, you can create a new guild. Naturally, most of the guilds will fall by the wayside over time—the Cow Killers, for example, surely cannot last forever. Regardless, the sheer number of guilds highlights the enthusiasm for a true role-playing environment and gamers' commitment to enjoying a game world that has stability and order, but also conveys enough of the politics to make it more than just a wilderness adventuring game.

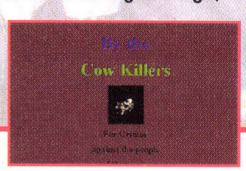
During our visit to Origin, Richard Garriott mentioned the Moongates (*www.moongates.com*) site: "It exemplifies the enthusiasm that fans are bringing to this already." With chat rooms, game information, and *The Britannian* fan-written newspaper, this is a great fan guide to what Ultima Online is all about.

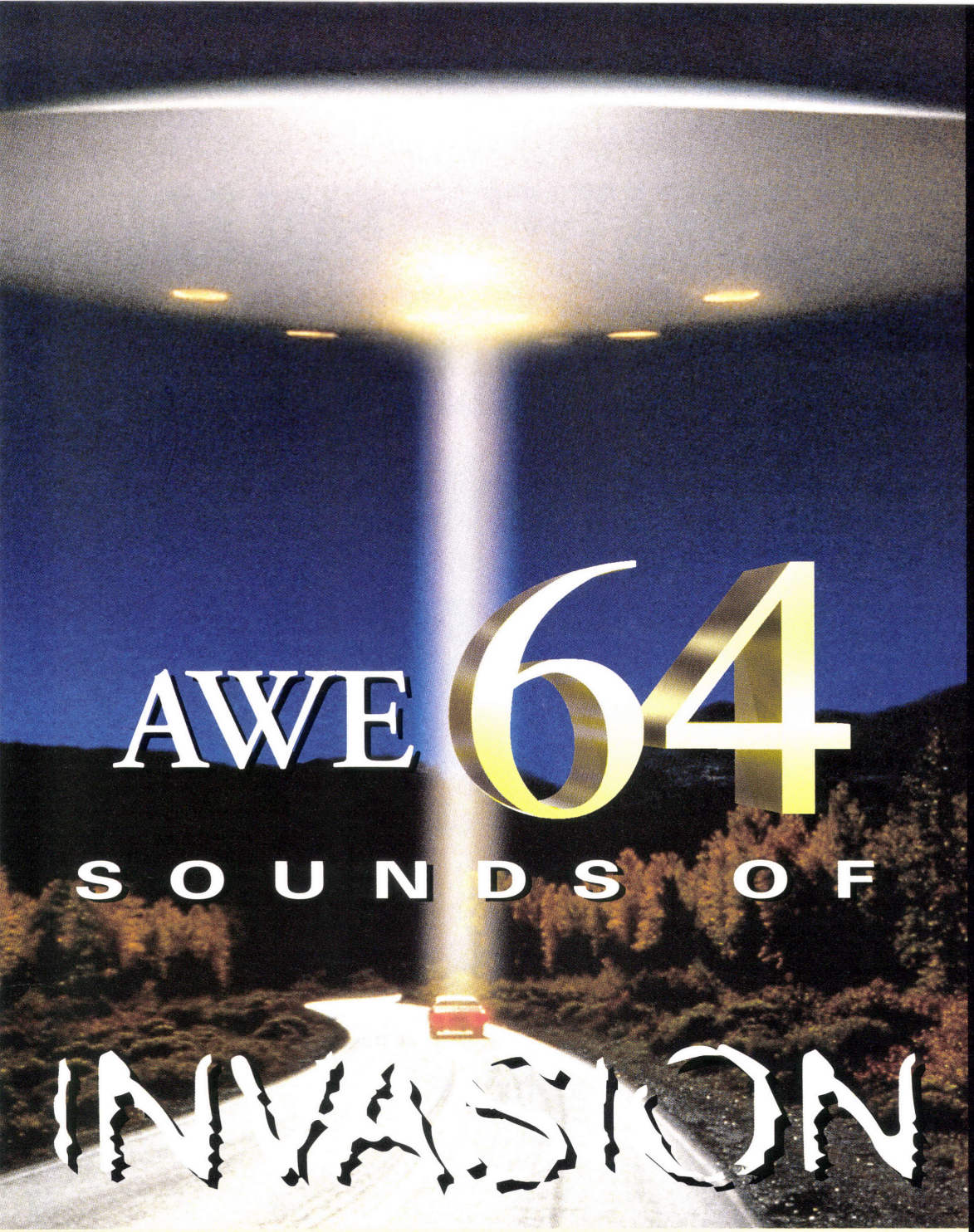
There's a strong diversity in guilds, too, which suggests that many players are already viewing the development of the game world differently. From the honorable Blades of Justice to The Dethroners of Lord British, who are opposed to his tyrannical rule, there are obvious alignment clashes.



But how about the Britannian Thespian League, a group dedicating themselves to providing plays and other entertainment for the people of Britannia? That's certainly one of the most noble goals of any of the currently registered guilds. And to prove that economics and high finance will be as much a part of the Ultima Online world as the real world, you will be able to open an account at the Bank of Britannia. Is this just a little too much like real life?







1. "We Come In Peace."
2. Blasting Ray Guns.
3. People Screaming.
4. "You Must Believe Me!"
5. Exploding Buildings.
6. Whirring Space Ships.
7. Brains Being Sucked.
8. Bones Crunching.
9. Aliens Phoning Home.
10. Metallic Scraping.
11. Cars Crashing.
12. Kidneys Bursting.
13. Insertion of Probes.
14. Heads Exploding.
15. "Run for Cover!"
16. "Warning."
17. Aliens Melting.
18. Pods Hatching.
19. Destroying the Monster.
20. Buildings Imploding.
21. Spaceships Docking.
22. Boiling Flesh.
23. "Mayday, Mayday!"
24. Exploding Spaceship.
26. "I saw a UFO!"
27. Planes Taking Off.
28. "We're at DefCon 1."
29. Aliens Communicating.
30. Children Crying.
31. Slurp.
32. Clink of Autopsy Instruments.
33. Laser Swords Crashing.
34. "Hyperspace!"
35. Flesh Being Torn Off Bones.
36. "They're Coming."
37. Wailing Sirens.
38. "You Must Die."
39. "Beam Me Up."
40. Zap!!!
41. Air Locks Closing.
42. "Oh, My God!"
43. Lasers Charging Up.
44. "We Need More Power!"
45. Ray Guns Blasting.
46. Calling the Mothership.
47. Horns Blaring.
48. "We Won!"
49. "Lock on Target!"
50. Crystals Charging.
51. Area 51 Guard: "No Admittance."
52. Zap-Zap!
53. Warning Alarms.
54. Air Locks Opening.
55. "Set to Stun!"
56. "Red Alert!"
57. Shields Up.
58. Warp Speed.
59. "Blast 'em!"
60. Eyeballs Squishing.
61. Spaceships Cloaking.
62. Radar Ping.
63. "Fire at Will!"
64. "Take Me to Your Leader."

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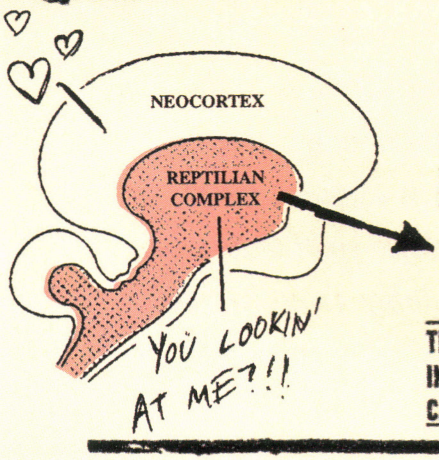

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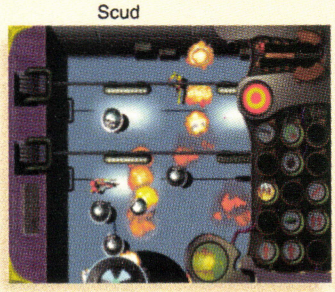
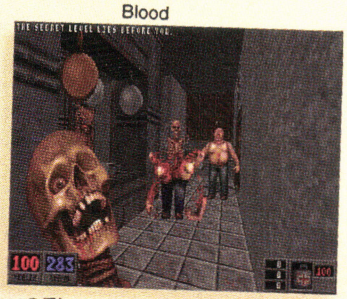
Scud



Blood



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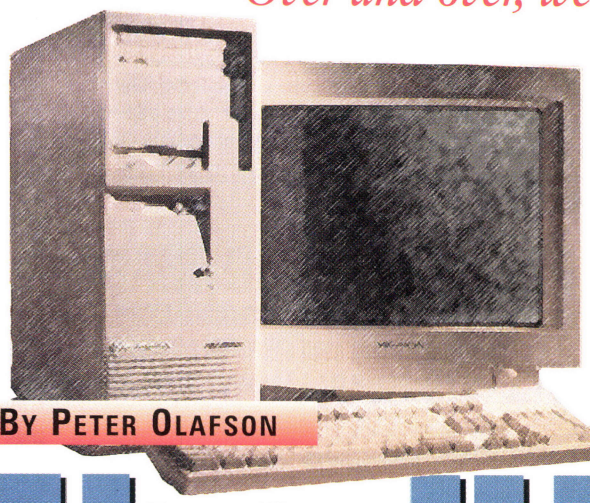
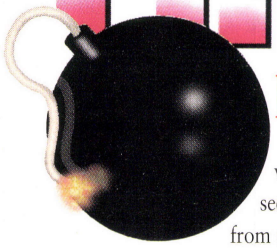
Over and over, we hear the question: *Which is better—PCs or consoles? Unthinkable a few years ago, the issue has become increasingly relevant due to the stunning advances in PC technology over the past couple of years. We tell you why the PC is the ascendant platform right now, what consoles are doing about it—and some of you tell us what you think, too.*



BY PETER OLAFSON

The Ultimate



It was The Thread That Would Not Die.

Indeed, like some vampiric monster, it seemed to gain strength from day to day. Beginning around the middle of last year, a console-versus-computer debate began to spread, ivy-like, across game and non-game Usenet newsgroups. History (or at least the Net search engines) no longer records who started the tumult. But his taunt, spread around the world via the Internet, turned into a mantra.

Its gist: For games, computers rule.

In a way, it's the silliest of quarrels, like 12-year-olds arguing over whether Superman could beat the Flash in a foot race. (Yes, he could.) The great "My Dad can beat your Dad" debate has gone high-tech; now it's "My CPU can beat your CPU."

Tomb Raider was just fine on the PlayStation...

Besides, in one sense, the $150 console and the $1,900 computer are allies. More and more games are appearing on both sides of the aisle—Activision's MechWarrior 2 has arrived on 32-bit consoles, and the Nintendo 64 *Star Wars* extravaganza Shadows of the Empire is headed for the PC. Indeed, many who own one type of system also own the other.

But there's a peculiar relevance to this exchange as the computer-game industry convenes at the third Electronic Entertainment Exposition in Atlanta. For the first time in a decade—since the late-'80s heyday of the Commodore Amiga—there is compelling evidence that computers can challenge and surpass the performance of dedicated game machines.

In short: For games, computers just may rule after all.

Tomb Raider drew the line in the sand and then crossed it. The Sony PlayStation and initial PC versions of Eidos' elegant 3D platformer were very similar in appearance and play. But the patch that added special features on computers equipped with the 3Dfx Voodoo chipset had an utterly transforming effect: The texture blending and perspective correction unique to this version allowed the game's essential realism to take a huge leap for-

...and then the amazing 3Dfx version for PCs came along.

ward, and Tomb Raider became the first showpiece game for the new 3D technology.

Even on 32-bit consoles like the PlayStation and the Sega Saturn, nothing came close. "It was the first convincing argument for getting a 3D hardware accelerator," says Colin Boswell, Eidos Interactive's vice president of technology. "Working in 3D, we're always trying to do the impossible: display [realistic] 3D on hardware that isn't capable of it. And now we're capable of doing what we've wanted to do all along."

Shadows of the Empire is the first PC game slated to move to the PC.

Battle

"The graphics advantage that consoles had is now eroding as 3D technology like ours and others becomes more widely available," says Greg Ballard, who heads up 3Dfx. "Suddenly, the PC platform is offering a generational advance over the console. In many respects, gaming aficionados are going to be forced to deal with PCs."

"It's a really exciting time," says Boswell. "You ain't seen nothing yet."

Apples and Oranges

The console-versus-computer debate is hardly new—it has roots in the early '80s, when the 8-bit Nintendo and Commodore 64 ruled the roost—and each side has a point. Computers are versatile, multipurpose machines that do many things well. You can code. You can browse the Web. You can process images. You can write a magazine article. You can manage your money.

And you can play an amazing variety of games—many of them significantly deeper and richer than those available on the console, owing to a permanent storage medium (the hard disk), high-resolution monitors, the ability to connect to the game-loving world via the Internet, and the varied input made possible by a keyboard.

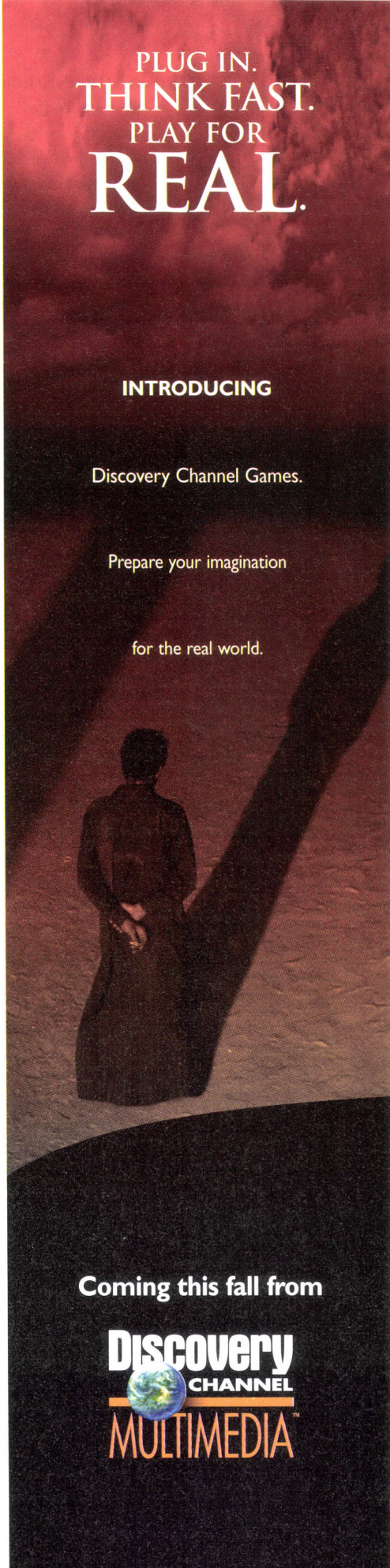
The thing is, you still have to pay for the PC—a good $1,900 for a decent system—and, if you want to stay ahead of the curve, you have to upgrade it regularly. It's also a complex monster, and when things go wrong, they can go spectacularly wrong.

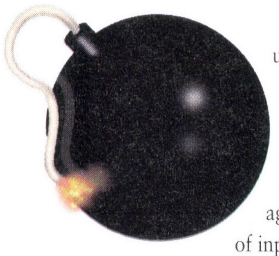
Consoles are made for play, pure and simple, and that sweet singularity of design permits a high level of performance. They're inexpensive (at this writing, the big three are clustered at $150), and, while the software can be pricey, it's widely available for rental. They're simple to operate, without any need to deal with the vagaries of video drivers, IRQs, and CONFIG.SYS files.

My friend owns a Nintendo 64, and personally, I don't think he has anything on there that I can't get for my outdated PC. Yeah, he can play Shadows of the Empire and Mario Karts and those things, but I can play cool games like Daggerfall, Duke Nukem 3D, and MechWarrior 2.

Luke Meyers
Via e-mail

"[The PC] has made tremendous progress," acknowledges Jim Merrick, software engineering manager for Nintendo of America Inc., "but it doesn't begin to approach the plug-and-play that the console can provide. A console is a $200 device. It sits in the living room. Anyone can





use it. There's no technophobia associated with [it]."

The downside? A lack of permanent storage space, the limitations of input devices, and comparatively modest amounts of RAM—the PSX has 3.5MB—tend to keep the games slightly simple and action-oriented. So, for instance, while some spectacular flying shoot-'em-ups such as Air Combat and Warhead have appeared on consoles, you're unlikely to see a true flight sim. Also, the resolution limitations of current pre-HDTV televisions means images can't be quite as sharp.

More importantly, while it's easier to play with a friend in front of a console, Internet gaming has only recently come to this platform. Last year, Sega launched NetLink, a 28.8Kbps modem for its Saturn console. For months the only NetLink-enabled Saturn game was Baku Baku. But in quick succession, Sega has added Sega Rally Championship, Virtual On, Saturn Bomberman, and even Duke Nukem 3D. Meanwhile, Sony's Yaroze is a black, $750 development PlayStation that, connected to a PC or Mac, enables coders proficient in the C language to write PSX games.

Also, Nintendo is planning a permanent storage medium, tentatively dubbed the 64DD, for the Nintendo 64. The device, scheduled to be unveiled in Japan in November, is expected to be similar to a Zip drive and will use 64MB high-density disks. (Imagine SimCity 2000 with N64 graphics.) Plus, while no dates have been projected or specifics released, Nintendo's looking down the road toward Internet play.

"Nintendo's not interested in becoming another me-too Web browser," says Merrick. "We're interested in online gaming—something that adds value to our core business. And to do something online, you need to have some local storage."

Still, the Internet gaming universe for consoles is extremely limited compared with the options available to PC gamers—and consoles aren't going to catch up anytime soon. With online games gaining in popularity and importance, this is a critical distinction. People—wily, clever, creative—are proving to be the crowning touch in more and more computer games.

Pilotwings 64 shows the N64's beautiful handling of perspective.

Games like Unreal and Prey will teach those console systems! PCs are the most powerful, versatile, and affordable platforms for truly sophisticated gaming.

Alexander Sandrowicz
Via e-mail

The PC Answers

Not surprisingly, the PC has made its gains by adopting some of the console's own finesse into its open architecture. A console is as you find it; an IBM-compatible is what you make it.

In particular, the 3D accelerator cards are the foot soldiers of the coming revolution. Using technology devised by companies like 3Dfx and Rendition, these graphic co-processors perform special functions that would bog down the main processor or standard 2D video card but, offloaded onto a special chipset, allow games to look more realistic and move more smoothly. In GLQuake, for instance, water suddenly becomes semi-transparent.

As things changed and 133s came up, then 166s, then 200s, and now MMX technology, I began to feel left out of the computer-gaming generation. Now, my computer's like a piece of trash compared to today's machines....I obviously know that console games are much better than computer games.

Victor Ramirez Jr.
Via e-mail

Some early works-in-progress that are built around 3D video-card technology fairly defy belief—such as an as-yet-unnamed game due this fall from a company working closely with 3Dfx. "It's a space-exploration game," says Ballard, "with thousands of polygons on each screen, so the models look completely real. You have a sense of being in a spacecraft and in space. I haven't seen anything that's even close to it [visually].

"The Holy Grail for the PC—what everybody in the 3D business talks about—is being able to do *Toy Story* in real time," he says. "We're still a ways away from that, but not as far as you might think. We're still on the first-generation ports. As more and more developers start writing directly to the hardware, we're going to see extraordinary things in graphic capabilities."

By 1998, Ballard says, "the graphic performance on the PC will be [to non-accelerated PCs] what Nintendo 64 is to the 16-bit world."

Psygnosis is already changing gears—and, significantly, it's owned by console-maker Sony. "We'll soon be leading on the PC for virtually every kind of game, even in genres that would be considered strictly console: action games, racing games, even platform games," says U.S. software development manager Jim Drewry.

The reason? Enhanced PC performance. Drewry points to 3D high-end PC versions of the racers Formula One and WipeOut XL: "On the PlayStation, they run at 320-by-240, in 16-bit color, with no perspective correction, no texture blending, no anti-aliasing, and no MIP-mapping. The PC version runs at 640-by-480 or 800-by-600 in 16-bit color with all these features turned on, plus additional ones."

Then there's Intel's Pentium MMX chip. Introduced in January, and already becoming standard Pentium equipment, it adds 57 new instructions to enhance performance when handling programs rich in graphics, video, and sound.

"Basically, it enables you to do 24-bit color and CD-quality sound effects with no loss in frame rate," explains Craig Lafferty, public relations manager for Epic MegaGames, whose MMX-enhanced 3D action game Unreal should hit the racks around October. "You take the average game with 8-bit or 16-bit sound, and it's pretty good. But if you bump it up to 44kHz, it kills the frame rate, because it takes so much of the processor."

WaveRace 64 has some nice water effects...

Not everyone, however, has been unreservedly enthusiastic about MMX. Some have expressed concern over a potential performance hit that results from its overlap with registers used by the floating-point unit, which is often used intensively in 3D games. And as of early May, the must-buy MMX game—one that persuades consumers that the new technology is indispensable—has yet to appear. But, in all fairness, it's early. "[MMX] is useful right now," Drewry says. "It will get better. The better [that] Direct3D supports MMX processors, the more we'll use it."

Some major publishers have lined up behind the technology, including GT Interactive (publisher of Unreal) and one of Sega's PC wings, Sega Entertainment, which was slated to launch the MMX-specific fighting game Virtual On in June. (In fact, all future products from SE—which has right of first refusal on PC conversions of Saturn games—are scheduled to support MMX.)

"Anything that allows our games to run 10 to 20 percent faster is always key," says Matt Wolf, who oversees Sega Entertainment's PC development.

The PC's advance is also a byproduct of huge advances in the raw processor power that has always been the hallmark of Intel-driven machines. The Pentium processor hit the 200MHz milestone a year ago, and was expected this past May to begin its march toward 300MHz with the formal introduction of the Pentium II. By contrast, the PSX uses an R3000A 32-bit RISC processor running at a touch under 34MHz, while the Saturn uses two Hitachi SH2 RISCs running at 28.6MHz.

Now, before you write in pointing out that your 486 system was running faster than that in 1991, note that the relative, or perceived, speed of consoles is actually much faster than their

...but then, so does GLQuake on the PC.

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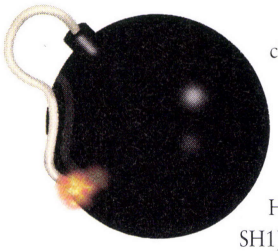

clock speed, because of their share-the-load architectures. For instance, the Saturn also runs a third Hitachi RISC chip (an SH1), two video display processors, the Saturn Control Unit, and a pair of sound processors.

One side effect of all this horsepower has been the increased development of 3D fighting games—a genre in which the PC (with the odd exception of games like F/X Fighter) has never been especially strong.

"The console platform is basically a Ferrari, geared toward high-end 3D-based gaming," explains Wolf. "The PC is much more of an all-terrain vehicle. It wasn't [originally] made to be a 3D polygon-pushing environment."

No matter how fast and impressive technology gets, I will always enjoy a head-to-head game of Tecmo Bowl for the Nintendo, FIFA '95 for Sega, and NBA Live '97 for the PSX. With the exception of Links, I have yet to get the same experience from any PC sporting game.

Trey Caraway
Via e-mail

That's changed, however. "The way [Virtua Fighter 2] is going to turn out wouldn't have been possible on a P60," he says. "Running at 100 percent, it's 30-frames-per-second, huge polygon count, backgrounds on, program textures on, fogging, effects....We'll be able to achieve that on a P133 with 16MB of RAM."

But faster is better only up to a point. Your processor may clock out at a blazing 200MHz, but your system runs at lower speeds internally (as slow as 66MHz) because of the way PCs handle data. Think of it as a four-lane highway with two lanes perpetually under construction. Ain't progress grand?

Well, one of those internal bottlenecks has already been addressed. The Dual Independent Bus Architecture, introduced with the Pentium Pro chip and slated for inclusion in the Pentium II late in the year, improves the speed with which data is passed from the processor into memory.

Meanwhile, the Accelerated Graphics Port standard—not yet available, but also due for inclusion in the Pentium II—addresses the slowdown between the processor and the graphics card. Rather than the PCI bus, graphics cards will now be able to use the CPU bus, which can handle data about four times faster—with a huge potential boost in 3D and realism. What's good now is likely to get better in the near future.

The 64-Bit Gorilla

Those developments pit the PC nicely against the likes of the PlayStation and the Saturn. And then there's the Nintendo 64. Oops.

The popular 64-bit system, released last September and at last reports selling as fast as Nintendo can make them, is built around a 93.75MHz RISC main processor and a pair of powerful co-processors whose functions read like a 3D accelerator card wish-list: Z-buffering, anti-aliasing, and perspective correction.

Naturally, new technology is only as good as the games produced for it, and the early output for the N64 has been inconsistent and slow to arrive. But Mario 64's size, complexity, and pure graphic appeal have already made it a legend. I've yet to see a computer game produce an effect as beguiling as the water in WaveRace (to say nothing of the dolphin beneath it). Acclaim's Turok: Dinosaur Hunter is a dazzling 3D shoot-'em-up with few real equals on either side of the debate. Pilotwings 64—an awe-inspiring flight-sim lite—is the sleeper of the bunch. These are games that look better than computer-game intros, and in one way or another, the N64 is going to have to be reckoned with—even if only in terms of raised consumer expectations.

*I think the PC has the potential to completely kill the console if the gamemakers quit sending out sh*t. You hardly ever see BUGS in a console game because that's all consoles are for: playing games.*

Terence Nielsen
Via e-mail

(Actually, that's begun. TechWorks is planning to include in its 3D accelerator card the zippy Rambus memory architecture used in the N64—a feature it asserts will permit performance at levels three times those of other 3D cards.)

Of course, the take on the N64's impact

Formula One, familiar to PlayStation gamers, is destined to look even sharper on the PC.

The N64's Super Mario 64 set an impressive new standard in console look and performance.

depends on whom you talk to. Some developers observe that, side by side, the specs for 3Dfx-based machines beat the N64. But Nintendo's Merrick says you'd need to have one of the newer Silicon Graphics models to match N64 power, and suggests that its console already has had an effect on the PC market.

> ***Anyone foolish enough to think a console system could even be compared to a high-end PC would have to be truly messed in the head. Comparing PCs to consoles is like comparing Harleys to tricycles.***
>
> *Kyle Hall*
> *Via e-mail*

"I don't think you'd see the 3D accelerators coming on the market as rapidly if it wasn't for the success of the Nintendo 64," says Merrick. "The major publishers—including Microsoft—are very concerned about Nintendo. I think we've reasserted ourselves."

For their part, the ante on the PC side is already going up again. Look for some 3D card-makers to introduce their second-generation technology later this year. If one of these products become a de facto standard—3Dfx, for instance, is projecting sales of 1.5 million to 2 million by year's end—you can expect to see it begin to appear on motherboards. New computer systems like the Gateway Destination—coupling the Pentium with big-screen TV and big sound—are aiming to bring the PC into the living room, traditionally the home of the console.

Consoles won't sit still, either. The long-awaited Matsushita console based on the 3DO Co.'s M2 technology hasn't appeared at this writing. (It's been rumored that it's based on twin PowerPC chips and may wind up with a DVD drive.) Sega and Sony haven't said anything formally about their future plans, but it's not unreasonable to expect that each will deliver a successor platform within the next two years.

Ballard predicts that the capabilities of game systems introduced between 1998 and 2000 will exceed those of computers once again. "But they'll have to start looking more like a PC," he adds. "Gamers are going to want more capability and more functionality," like Internet play.

For now, at least, the PC is in the ascendant. The battle has been joined. And The Thread that Would Not Die lives on. ■

> ***Of course you know this dispute is never going to be won. To me, they're perfectly even—no winners, no losers.***
>
> *Andy Hostetler*
> *Via e-mail*

Peter Olafson is a contributing editor for PC Games. *He is based in Hoboken, N.J.*

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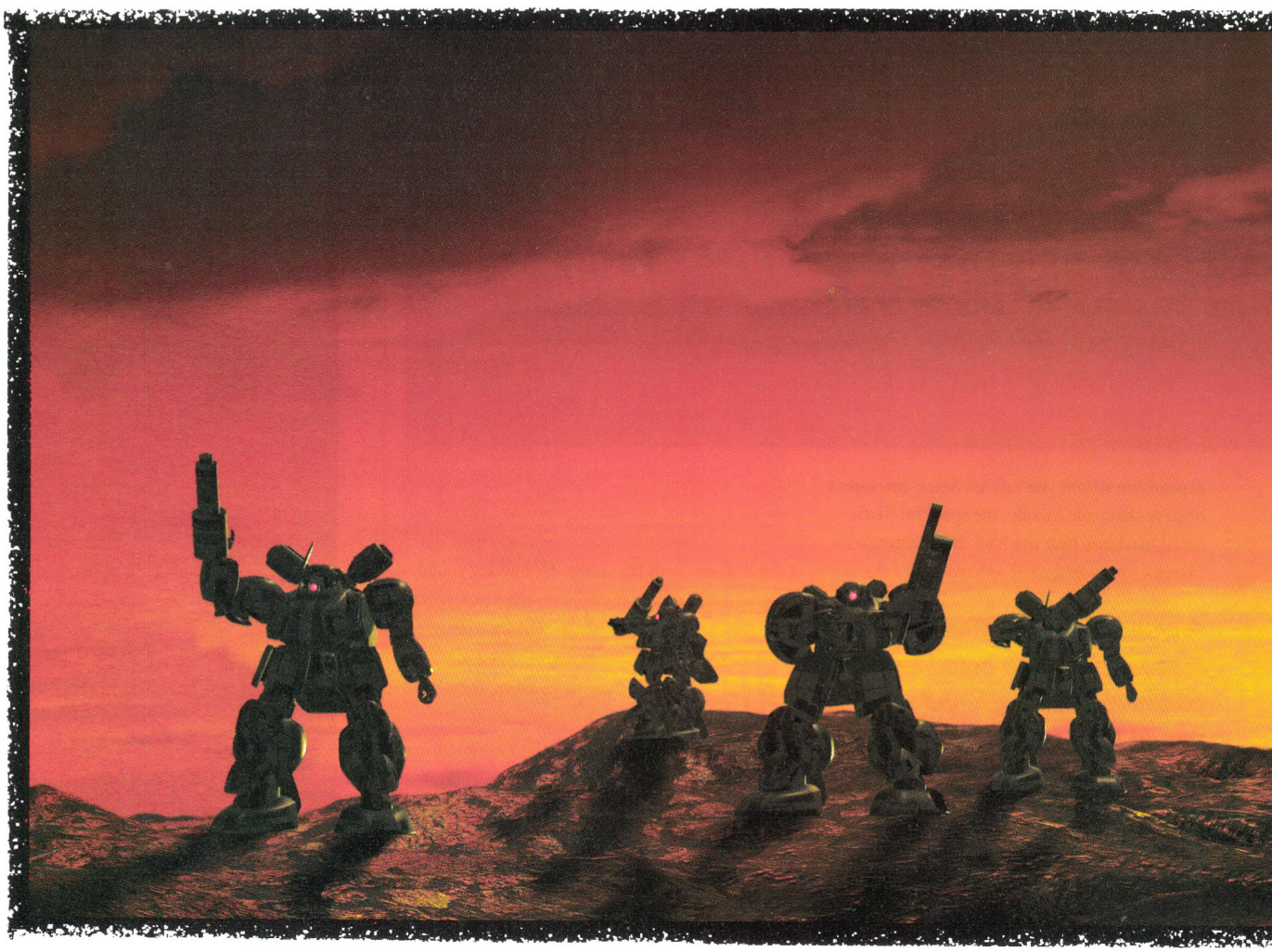

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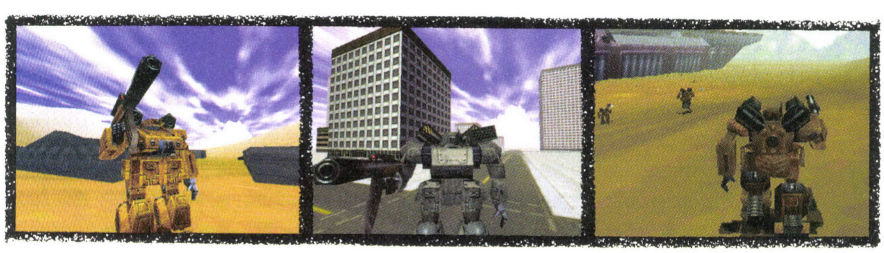

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THE COMPLETE SOLUTION

MDK

Abbreviations

Snipe: Go into sniper mode and use a single shot to the head to destroy an alien.
Parajump: Jump, then hold the key down to float the desired distance.

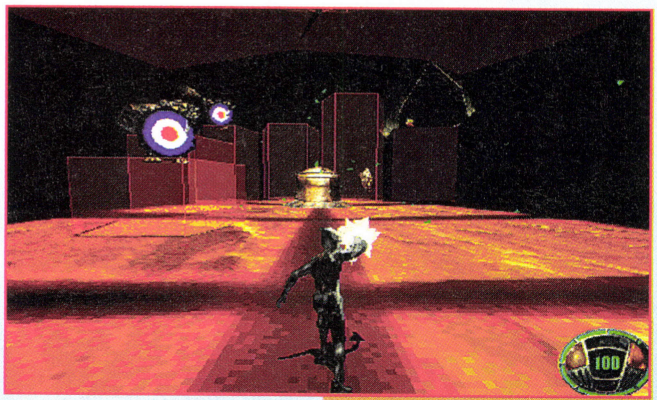
Everything you always wanted to know about MDK, but couldn't find

(and maybe even a cheat or two)

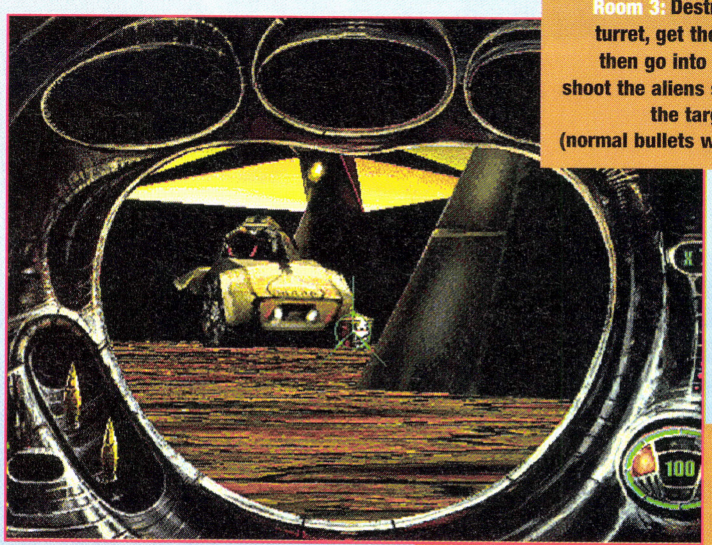
The road to MDK's confrontation with bad guy Gunta is filled with painful obstacles. But that torment can be eased by following the guidelines presented here—many of which come straight from the developers' mouths. Yup, that's right: We cajoled and bullied the guys at Shiny into revealing some of the game's many secrets. Here's everything you'll need to finish the game and experience its wonders.

Level One: Laguna Beach

There's a 150-health powerup behind you as you land. In Room 2, snipe the targets held by the enemies, then hit the skull bomb. Parajump to the mortar, then snipe a mortar through the hole marked by the blue arrows.

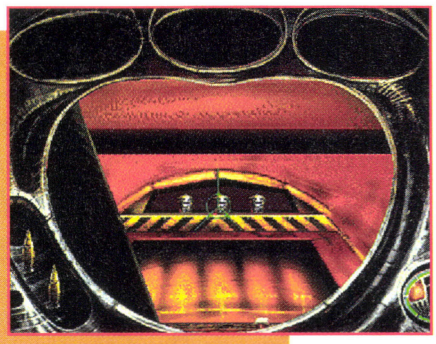


Room 3: Destroy the respawn turret, get the Dummy Decoy, then go into snipe mode and shoot the aliens standing behind the targets in the head (normal bullets will do the trick).



Room 4: Look left at the entrance to this room and line up the skull explosive in snipe mode. As the tank lands, shoot the explosive to destroy it.

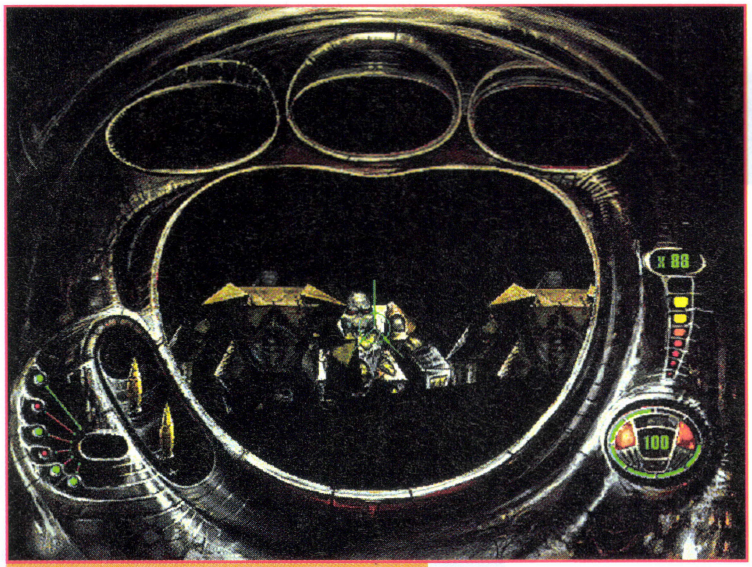
By Rob Smith



Room 4 (cont.): Look further to the left and, still in snipe mode, shoot one of the three skull explosives in the building, destroying the two respawn turrets. Beware of the kamikaze enemies coming from this building; you have time to take them out easily in snipe mode. Go to the right and get the Bones Airstrike. In the room at the end, concentrate fire on the respawn turret. Also, check each of the enemy foxholes for powerups. At some point, chain gun ammo will drop, along with an extra supply of grenades.

Most important: Never, ever, charge straight into a room with guns blazing, unless you want to get fried in a hurry. As a door opens, go to snipe mode and scan around. Be on the lookout for alert droids.

Room 9: Go up to the left and shoot the defective droid. Jump in and then go through the room with the enemies (toy with them by pressing fire and watch their reactions!). At the end, grab the Interesting Bomb and fling it at the enemies. Then hide.



Room 10: Fire a sniper grenade at the head of the enemy controller. One careful shot should take him out. If it doesn't, don't panic—sniper grenades will appear after a while to give you a hand.

Room 5: This next corridor has a few kamikaze bombers. Snipe two or three of the guards having a chat on the far right. Chain ammo should make short work of the respawn turret to the left. Run in and shoot the alert droid, then run up the passage to the right, destroying the respawn turret at the top. There are some homing bullets to the right inside the entrance, and grenades in the train. Destroy the tank with grenades.

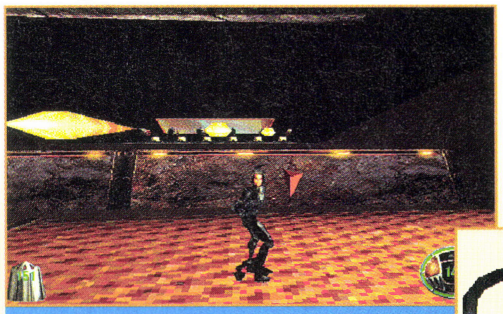
Room 6: Shoot, but don't destroy, the signal box inside the door. Jump in the ship for a bombing run. When you get the chance, bomb the building roofs to make things easier when you're on the ground. In snipe mode, shoot the bomb suspended below the ship to destroy the door.

Room 7: Hide behind the block to the right and shoot the flyers from behind as they pass. From here, use a sniper grenade to destroy the gun in one shot. Fire mortars down the chutes. Strafe to avoid the tanks' fire and destroy them. Go up the ridge to the left, then parajump to the center of the side where the tanks were. There's a 150 health at the far end.

Room 8: Drop down and shoot the target. Jump on the air shaft to reach the first platform. Run and jump around the platforms, shooting or sniping the enemies.

Level Two: Lingfield, England

Room 1: Wait for the sniper grenade to fall. Down the corridor, an alert droid is difficult to kill without being spotted. The grenade makes killing the blue guard easier.



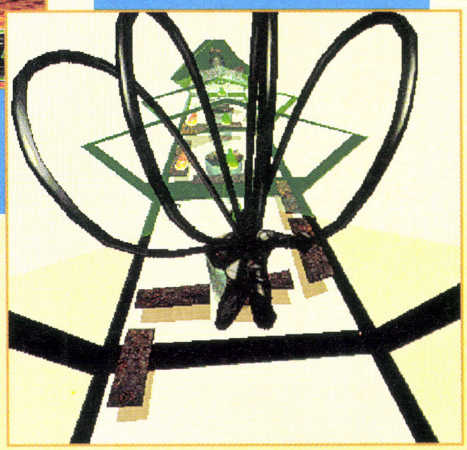
Room 2: To minimize damage from the big guns, face them and then sidestep along, dodging the bolts. Should you need health, there's a 100 powerup in the pit.

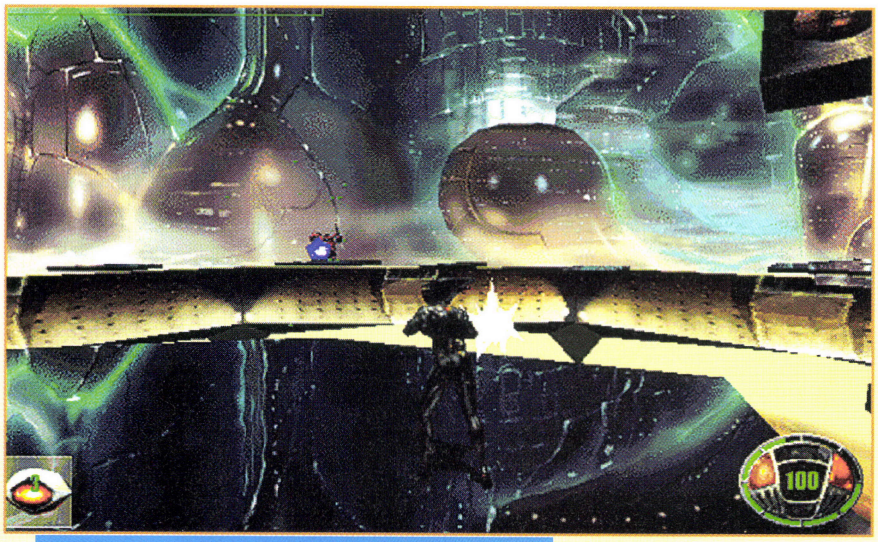
Room 3: Fire a mortar through the letter-box hole to get the nuke.

Room 4: Hit the cigar-chomping guard with a sniper grenade and finish him off before getting the hand grenades and blowing up the bomb-carrying guys.

Room 5: Kill the 2 guards, then jump onto the middle gun (with the 50 health) and fire 3 times.

Room 6: Keep the parajump on and float toward the guns as far as possible, before landing on one of the platforms. Watch the firing pattern and time your move across the platforms to avoid the bolts. Should you fall off, there are respawn turrets, as well as homing sniper grenades and a 150 health, on the ground.

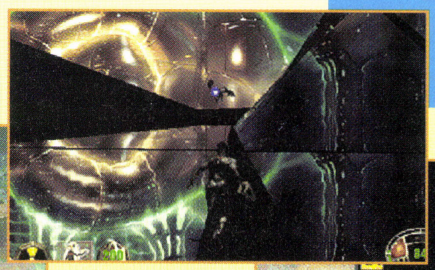


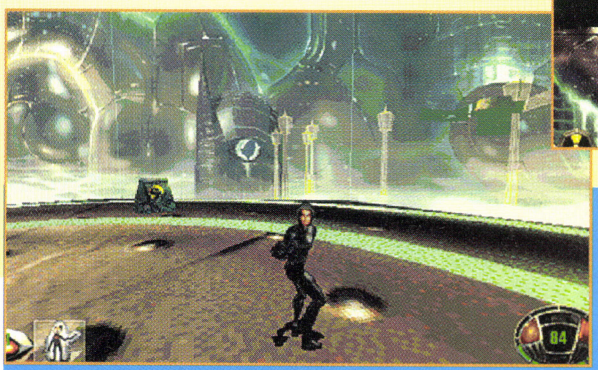


On the parachute drop before each level, don't panic. Keep moving around; the radar will hit you at some point, but if you keep moving, the missiles won't. All the powerups are useful, but chain gun ammo is especially so; try to get this one.

Room 7: A test of your jumping control. Keep moving on the platforms, firing at the red guard, who you must kill to open the exit ramp. Moving different directions should make the swinging ball miss you.

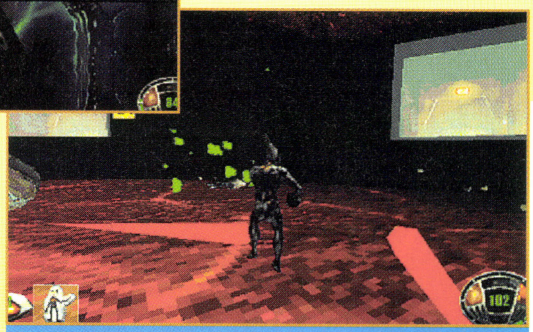
Room 8: A tough but impressive room. The blue guards control the aerial attack, so take them out first: one is ahead to the left, and the other comes in behind when you attack the first one. Take out the red guards and collect the powerups before heading to the back of the large pyramid. There are alert droids semi-hidden on each corner: Take them out and then attack the large guard.





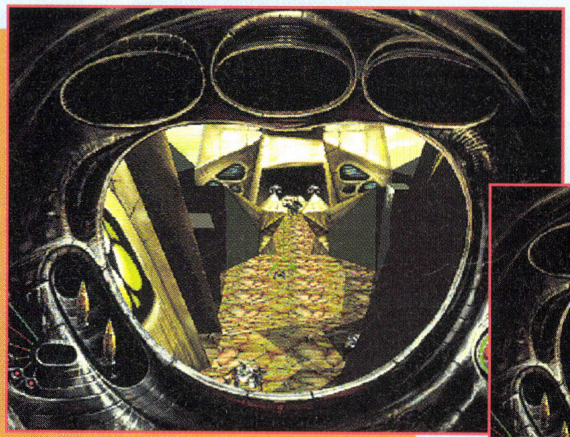
Room 9: Shoot the first two guys who come off the platform, and then let the platform leave. Head to the far-left corner, following the bright blue outline on the ground. At the corner, there's a teleport to the combat arena and a 150 health. Run over the middle of the arena to return, then jump on the next platform.

decoykurt



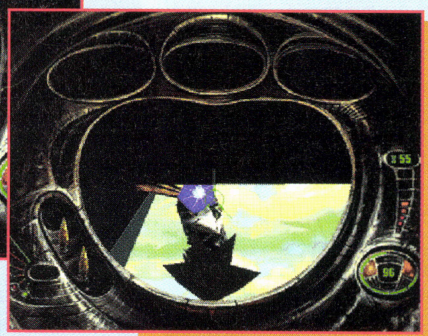
Room 10: Snipe the boss in the eye and nose. Destroy his ship. Once on the ground, concentrate on shooting him. He runs a pattern from each door to let more guards in (the guards get in the way, so take a few out to get clearer shots at the boss). He's tough, so save the 50 health on the ramp for when you need it.

Level 3: Livingstone, Scotland



Room 1: There's loads to snipe from the entry point—two guns in the distance, two guards hiding and running toward you. Move carefully forward. Snipe the guard and alert droid on the high-left platform. Take out the alert droid on ground level. Snipe the other guards who have come into view, then snipe the two triangle shapes at the sides of the end door. Two kamikaze guards run out. Run and jump across the ramp to your right. There's a tough guard, and sniper ammo. Try to get him with one shot, but get out of the way if he turns. Jump around to the left, up the ramp, and leap across to the chain ammo, and then across to the Bones powerup. As you approach the end door, there's an alert droid to your right.

Room 2: Snipe the alert droid, then take out the two gun emplacements. There's a Dummy Decoy to the left and homing bullets to the right. Reinforcements will arrive: Kill them and get the chain ammo from in the pool. Pat the dog (with bullets!).



Room 2 (cont.): Go down the ramp carefully and snipe the two guards ahead. While still on the ramp, snipe the two guards to the left and right. Edge to the left center of the ramp and inch down until you can see the guy on the airboard. Sniping him in the head will leave his board, which you can jump on to get the World's Most Interesting Bomb.

When the action gets intense, try to concentrate your fire on one enemy at a time (eye the green bar at the top left to see how much damage you're doing). Also, always make sure that when you're firing, you're actually hitting something: bullets turn green or red when you're inflicting damage.

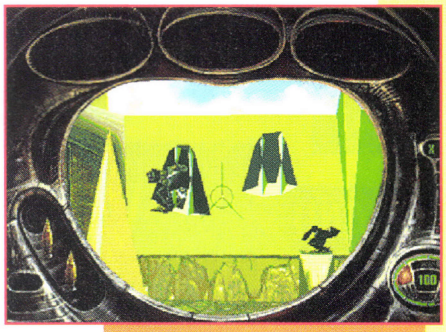
Level 4: Kirkcaldy, Scotland

Room 1: As you parajump in, blast the guard by the chain ammo and grab it to make short work of the big guard. Jump on the board.

Room 2: Shoot the signal for the ship. The key in this stage is to hit the towers firing blue bolts. Keep the target at the top of the shooting area, so if you miss anything you can pull back to try and hit it again. Concentrate on the gun emplacements. There's a Dummy Decoy in the hut where you land. Powerups are lying around, but guards always fly in. There's a Bones powerup in the hut by the exit.

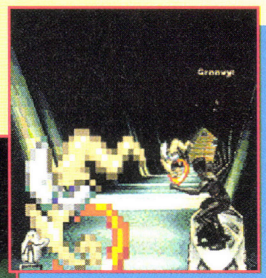
Room 3: Snipe the guard and take out the guns to the left. Enter the area with three water tanks. Concentrate on just one tank and shoot it until it explodes. Repeat this for all three, minding the dogs who come to bother you. Jump on the wobbling board.

Room 4: Pick up all the useful powerups (leave any health apples you don't need right now). Shoot the walls. Run into the center of this enemy-infested room and throw the Interesting Bomb. Respawn points are your main priority: If you don't have the bomb, use grenades to destroy the respawns. The Tornado and Dummy Decoy will be useful if things get really hairy...which they will.

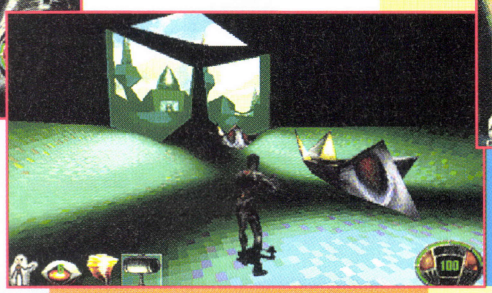


Room 7: Snipe the guys you can see in their hidey holes and the guns above your head. On the floor, jump to the block with the mortar. Jump into the hole straight ahead and destroy the gate mechanism. Beware the kamikazes through the door and also the two charging guards around the corner. Shoot the bottom-left corner of the structure (the bullets turn red).

Room 5: Hit the two gun emplacements with normal bullets in snipe mode, then use sniper grenades on the respawn turret found on the green ledge (you can see the bottom-left corner of it from the entry). On the floor, strafe to avoid the charging aliens. There's a 150 health running around. Jump into the lowest red square, but don't go out into the open until you've destroyed the alert droid to the right. Snipe the two guards on the yellow platform. Get the chain ammo and Tornado. The blue room at the top is the exit; before jumping to there, throw in a couple of mortars (watch the bullet cams) to destroy the blue guard. From the edge of the blue area you can parajump to the ledge with the Bones powerup.

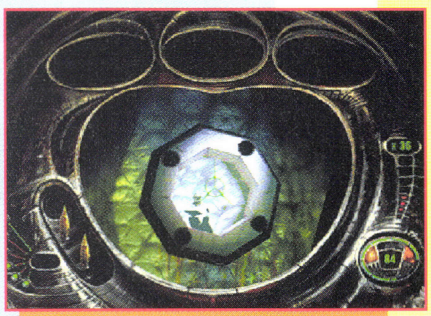


Board Ride #2: Try to get the 10 Bones to get Bones' assistance with a Tornado. There's one vital jump to make onto a ledge full of Earthworm Jims, which bring down the cows on the gun turrets ahead. At the end, stay near the middle to get the 10 health before flying off the edge.



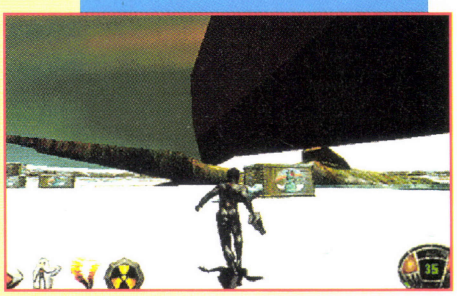
Room 8: Through the door, snipe the alert droid and the guy on the board and jump on the board to go for a ride.

Room 6: Snipe the two guns at the far end and destroy the guards. Up the air shaft, destroy the guards at the top. Snipe the two guards to either side of the big guard and run toward him. Two airboard riders will appear over his shoulder; run back the way you came, halt, and go into snipe mode. Both airboarders will pause momentarily; a very skillful head shot will release a board for you to take a ride. Should you manage this, relax and watch the fun (and fire when ready).

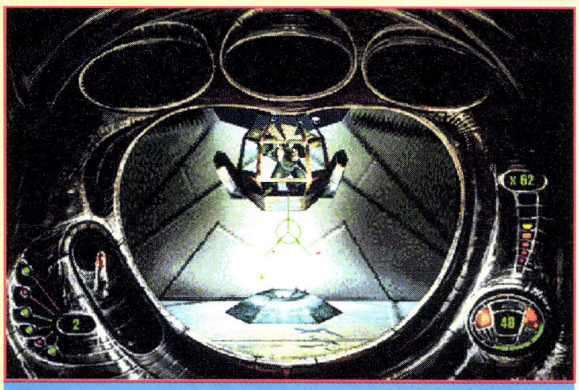


Room 9: Kill the dogs coming out, but snipe the four balls as they glow and stop spinning. This will take a few attempts, so be careful to avoid the bolts they fire. There's a 50 health should you need it. Hit all four red balls to end the level.

Room 3: Beware of two charging enemies. Destroy the tank by circle-strafing it and throwing any grenades you have to get the nuke. Free the seals once the enemies are dead, or they'll become the focus of attention! Get the sniper grenades from the top of the sub.



Keep run mode on virtually all the time.



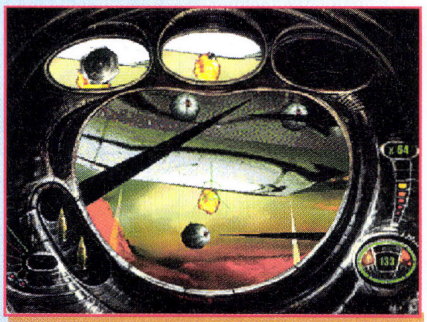
Room 4: Throw grenades into the air shaft to destroy the gun.

Room 5: From the entrance, snipe all four respawn turrets (normal bullets will do it, but it takes time). There are two ahead, one to the left, and one behind, which can be seen if you move to the right and look back past the entrance.

Board Ride #3: You can make another vital jump to get help from Earthworm Jim. Try to have less than five items in your inventory, as there is some chain ammo along the way that makes the turrets a lot easier to deal with.

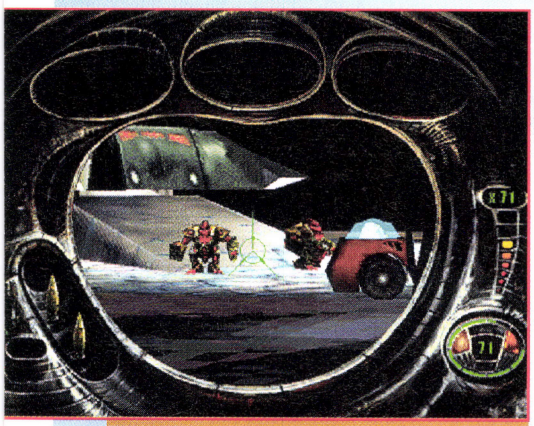
Room 6: Take out the ship immediately and head to the air shaft to get the chain ammo. Use the Tornado if necessary. In the center of the next area is a 150 health. Face the boss, move forward, and throw grenades; as he fires balls, back up so that they bounce over you. Repeat this forward-grenade-backward process until he's destroyed.

Level 5: Sparrowpit, England

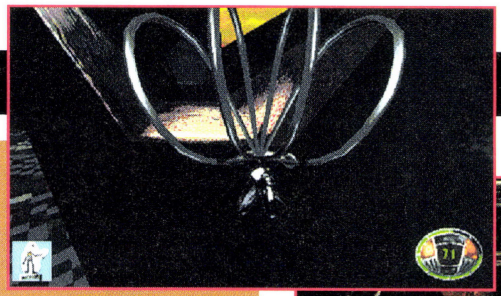


Room 1: Snipe the guards and the blue bolt–firing balls on the ship. There are two alert droids—one in the middle of the main floor area (get it once the ship is destroyed) and the other in front of the nuke door.

Room 2: Don't race into this room. Kill the alert droid on the right of the door, then the two careless red guards.

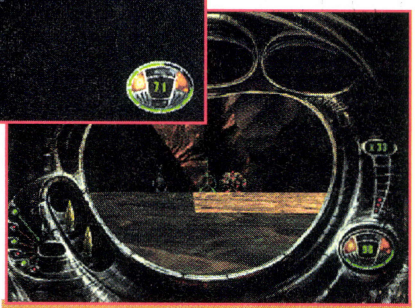


Room 2 (cont.): Snipe the big guard from behind the block and take out one of the guards in front of the ship (the other runs into it) and the one behind the ship.



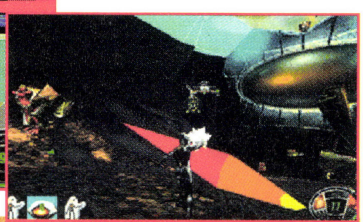
Room 2 (cont.): Run up the nearest ramp, jump onto the next block, and run and parajump in the direction you're facing onto a concealed corridor. Snipe the skull bomb. The ridge protects you from fire from the ship, so just blast it. Snipe the guard to the left. To open the barrier, push the forklift onto the yellow square by firing at it. To bypass this, from the ledge with the ridge, turn to the right and jump to grab onto another concealed ledge that leads down behind the barrier. Collect the chain ammo after you've destroyed and moved the forklift.

Room 3: Snipe the first two guards. Jump and fire to the right to take out the alert droid. Snipe the guy in the control room. Shoot the balls on the ship and then snipe the pilot. Red guards will attack you; strafe to kill the big guard.



Room 5: Snipe the alert droid and the two dozing guards. Destroy the blue guard at the right opening. Snipe the sleeping guards inside to get the grenades and nuke. On the other side, snipe the alert droid to make taking out the sleeping guards a simple matter of one bullet to the head. Go up the ramp fast and use grenades to destroy three respawn turrets (and an alert droid). At the other side, snipe the alert droid. Either drop the Thumper down the hole or use a couple of mortars to destroy the blue guard. Another blue guard at the top of the ramp can be taken out with two mortars.

Room 4: Blast the creatures and shoot the world until it falls. Pick up the mortars from the far side. Parajump down, firing as you go, and you should be able to destroy everything before you land. Watch out for two red guards turning up.



Room 6: This is a mad dash for freedom. Running to the left, grab the chain ammo from behind the central pillar. Either run down the middle, destroying the respawn turrets, or make quicker headway by going down the path on the right side of the channel (getting the homing sniper grenades as you go). Destroy the blue guard, nuke the door, nab the 50 health, and get the hell out.

In snipe mode: 1 = normal bullets, 2 = homing bullets, 3 = sniper grenades, 4 = homing sniper grenades, 5 = mortar, 6 = Bones airstrike.

Never collect health (especially 50, 100, and 150 powerups) unless you really need it. In many cases, you can go back and collect it—and you'll need to.

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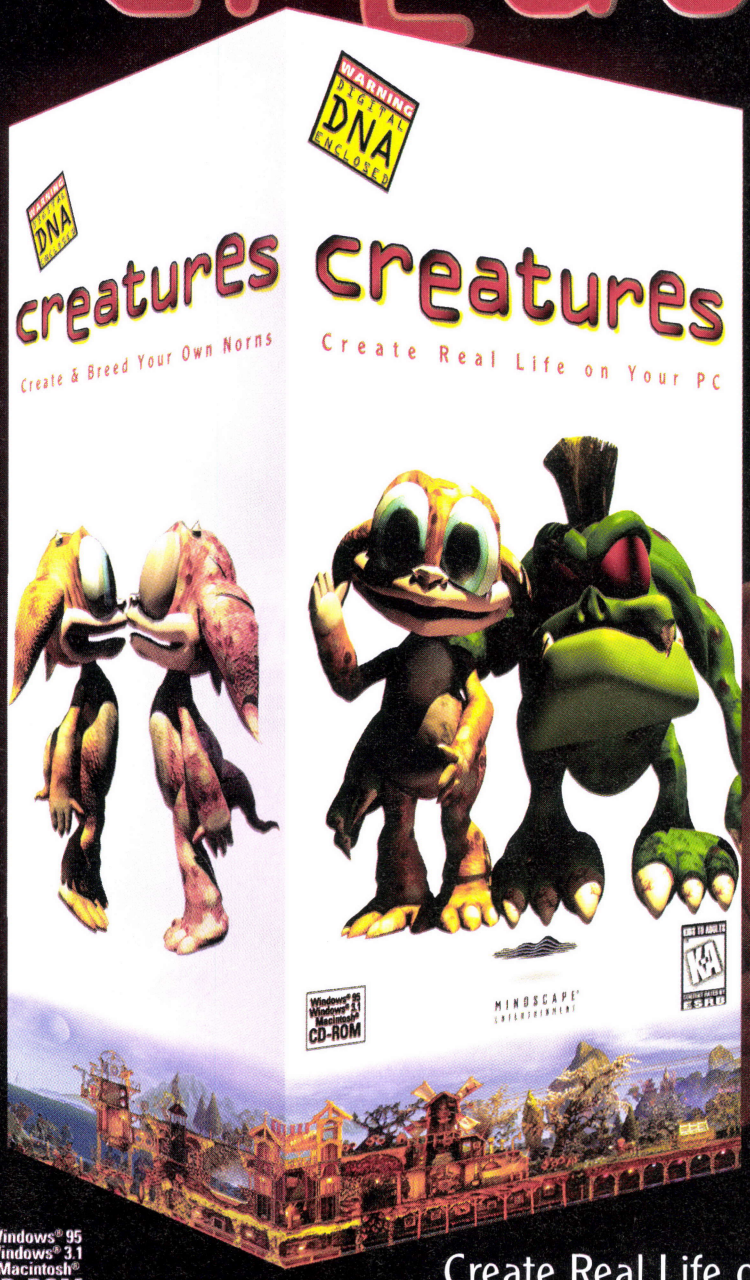

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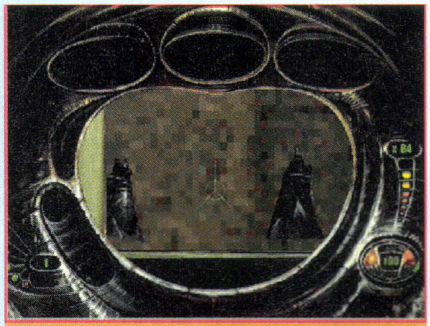
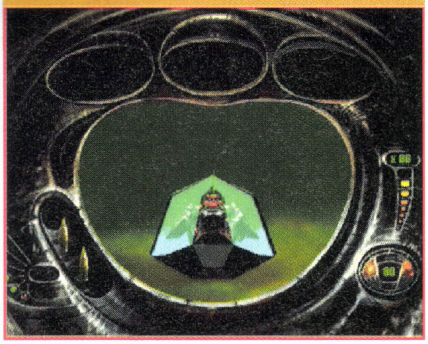


Room 7: A perfect example of the importance of snipe mode. Take out the two alert droids straight ahead. Look to the right: There's another alert droid hidden behind the blocks. Jump up to the right, onto the slope, and look behind the block to see another droid. Kill this one, run and grab the chain ammo, and take care of all the enemies.

Push a truck to jump onto the block by the entrance. Turn to face the narrow ledge. Turn off run mode and parajump so that you pull up on this thin platform. Jump up onto the wider ledge. Try to time shooting the forklift so that it stops near the next platform. (If it falls off, another emerges from the area with the 50 health.) Jump on the truck, onto the platforms, then to the exit.

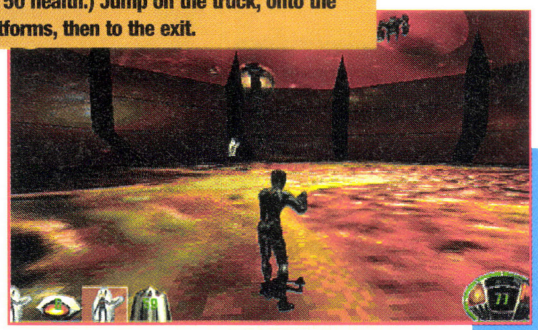
Room 8: Snipe the guy in the turret. (One shot will draw his attention to make hitting his head a lot easier). Jump to the floor and kill the dog. Snipe the other two floating turrets. Snipe the four red guards: there are two to the left, two to the right. Go back up the ramp and parajump to the air shaft to the right. Paraglide across to the next, then to the highest. Turn to face the exit and glide from there all the way across.



Room 9: Shoot Gunta. Jump across to the mound and watch the ship. This is tough: The ship is only still for a second or so, so make your snipe shots at the balls count. As the ship flies overhead, keep moving and be wary of a red guard dropping in. If you need health, there's a 50 and chain ammo on the floor below the mound, but you need to avoid a rolling ball. Take out all the balls to watch Gunta run off with Bones.

Level 6: The Finale

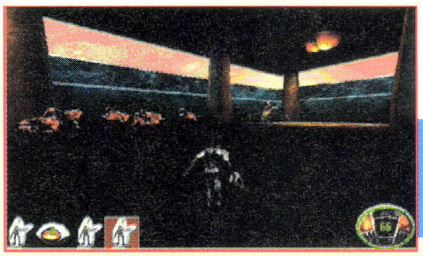
The big guards can be sniped with one shot by hitting them in the eye.



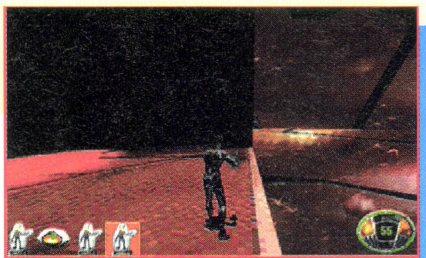
Room 1: Two large guards fly in; try to destroy one before he lands. Keep strafing to destroy the big guard, then head up the ramp, avoiding but ignoring the enemies rolling past. Grab the homing sniper grenades before destroying the respawn turret.

masterblaster

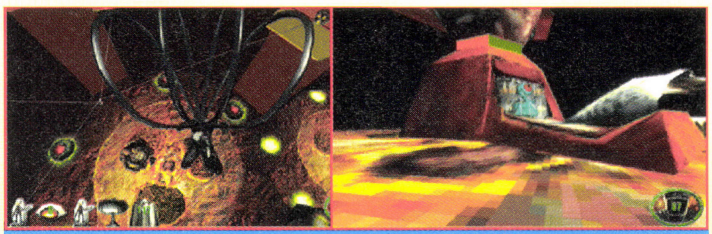
Room 4: The object is to kill Gunta on top of the block. Use homing sniper grenades. Keep running around, getting the powerups and using them to clear the enemies, then hit Gunta with the grenades whenever you get a safe chance. Try to save the 100 health until the ramp appears.



Room 2: Just kill all Gunta's dogs.



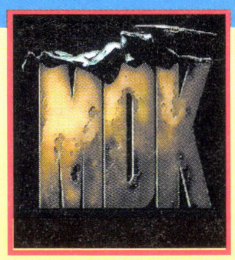
Room 3: Tight to the left wall from the entrance is an alert droid; destroy it before entering the room. As the enemies flood in with the beam of light, run to the far side and jump up to grab the chain ammo. Leap across to the homing sniper grenades and run along this ledge. Jump to the platform nearest the edge and then run and jump on the platforms, shooting everything (don't stop). At the top, a gun emplacement appears. Save enough chain ammo to make easy work of it, and then jump down the shaft.



The final confrontation:

The object is to move Gunta from the middle by throwing him baby seals to eat. Grab the nukes from under him, then get to an air shaft and blow the door. This opens another shaft. Repeat the process, killing the guard as he appears each time. Don't linger in the middle or Gunta will stamp hard. After the third nuke, you should have saved Bones, who goes on to perform a bit of amazing self-sacrifice.

Now sit back and enjoy the amazing finale. Congratulations! But, can you do it on Hard difficulty, just saving at the end of every level?



3D VIDEO

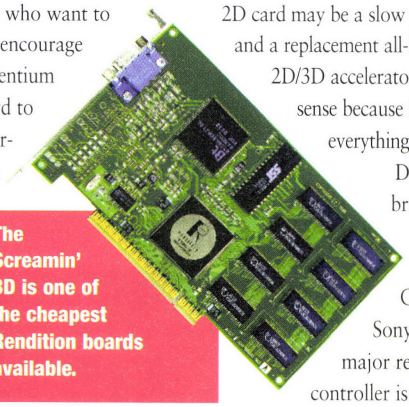
WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

By George T. Chronis

For more than a year, *PC Games* has been cooing about the joys of 3D video acceleration. If our incoming mail is any indication, our readers have been taking notice. Unfortunately, it's one thing to be sold on the joys of 3D video, and quite another making sense of all the competing accelerators and chipsets. We can tell you're confused, because hundreds of you have asked us, "What should I buy?" Here's our answer.

What You Need

Lusting after a 3D Lara Croft is not enough of a foundation for 3D video; your hardware is going to have to be up to the task. A lot of the 3D questions we've received have come from people with 486 machines who want to buy a video accelerator. Although we encourage serious gamers to move up to a fast Pentium as soon as possible, adding a 3D board to a 486 is possible as long as the motherboard has PCI expansion slots. PCI is a faster motherboard architecture that was standardized with the arrival of the Pentium chip; all of the hot new 3D boards are PCI-slot accelerators. Some late-model DX2 and DX4 486 motherboards came with PCI slots, but there won't be many such systems out there. Bottom line: If you own a Pentium, you don't have to worry. To be sure, check your computer's motherboard manual to determine which slots are PCI—they are usually shorter than the ISA slots your sound card or internal modem is plugged into.

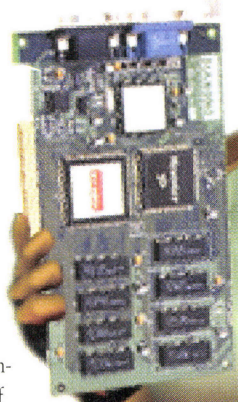


The Screamin' 3D is one of the cheapest Rendition boards available.

What 3D Is Right for You

Accelerators come in two flavors—as an add-on to an existing SVGA controller, or as an all-in-one 2D/3D product that replaces your existing SVGA controller. To figure out what type of accelerator you should be looking at, here are a few gamer stereotypes to match yourself against; choose the one that fits your equipment.

Do you own a garage-shop wonder? If you purchased your computer from a local retailer that builds to order, it's very likely that the video controller is an add-on board. Such retailers appreciate the customizability of a bare motherboard, making it easy to add different components as requested by customers. If you own one of these systems, you actually have the most 3D accelerator options, and can go all-in-one or add-on. If you purchased your system recently, chances are you already have a fast 2D SVGA card, such as a Diamond Stealth, on the motherboard. If this is the case, there's no reason to dump your investment; buy an add-on 3D card that will work with what you've got. But if you have an older Pentium under 100MHz, your 2D card may be a slow performer, and a replacement all-in-one 2D/3D accelerator makes sense because it will speed everything up.



Do you own a brand-name consumer PC? If you own a Compaq, HP, Acer or Sony computer from a major retailer, your SVGA controller is most likely built into the motherboard. Your easiest solution is to buy an add-on 3D accelerator that works in concert with your motherboard video. You can add an all-in-one card, but you'll have to disable the built-in video first. The problem with that is that not all motherboards work hand-in-hand with Windows 95. If they don't, Win 95 will always find the built-in video every time you start the computer, and there will be a resource conflict that disables your all-in-one card unless you can figure out what switches to throw on the motherboard to turn off the original video for good.

Do you own a cost-is-no-option computer built for speed? If you

"Strap on your seatbelt, turn up the 8-track, and get ready for one helluva cool ride."
-PC Games

"It's a blast."
— PC Gamer

"...everything I-76 does, it does well."
— CNET (gamecenter.com)

"Interstate '76 was designed by Activision's MechWarrior 2 team and the pedigree shows."
—Computer Gaming World

"GET THIS GAME!!!"
— GameSpot Player Review

"The Verdict: I-76 is an early contender for the best game of the year."
— Gamesmania

"Interstate '76 is a rare joy – a game positively overflowing with solid ideas and great gameplay."
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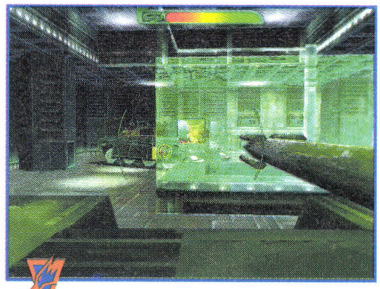
BLOWS THE COMPETITION AWAY WITH FURIOUS ACTION & STUNNING 3-D GRAPHICS!

If there's one thing that's been missing in the recent deluge of PC games, it's intense action. I'm talking about the type of gameplay that gets your heart racing, your hands sweating and keeps you short of breath. Well, thanks to Blue Byte Software, (makers of such classic games as Archimedean Dynasty and The Settlers II Gold Edition), That's all about to change...

Extreme Assault proves that, after producing award winning titles in the Strategy, RPG and Adventure genres, Blue Byte also knows how to cut the mustard when it comes to arcade-styled, fast-paced intense action games.

Set in a futuristic theater of war, *Extreme Assault* guides the player through six totally different operation zones, each sub-divided into multiple missions requiring the completion of a variety of exciting tasks. Objectives range from destroying all the enemy units in a given area, to rescuing hostages, defending towns, pulverizing hidden bases, and even engaging alien forces!

At times you'll also find yourself in restricted quarters and have to transfer from your lethal Sioux AH-23 attack helicopter to the awesome T-1 battle tank. Each vehicle is heavily armed with a vast array of weapons ranging from Laser Guns and Guided Missiles, to enormously powerful Smart Bombs and Thunderbolts. And I haven't even mentioned the graphics!



Enjoy spectacular MMX™ enhanced transparent effects including holograms, explosions and laser barriers!

Strike the enemy hard and fast with a powerful 21st century attack helicopter and state-of-the-art battle tank!

Fight many short intense missions that will keep your adrenaline pumping for hours on end!

All of the action is viewed in spectacular 3D, either from your virtual cockpit or from the outside of the craft, with incredibly colorful graphics and superb special effects. *Extreme Assault* runs on a 3D engine so advanced that you can enjoy this finely detailed world without an accelerator card. The realistic sound effects and CD audio track further enhance your immersion into this exhilarating and treacherous world created by Blue Byte.

Bottom line... ***Extreme Assault*** is THE 3D intense action game for the PC!

Matt Broughton

EXTREME INFO

To experience the intense action for yourself, call (800) 933-2983 and get a FREE playable demo.
Mention source code # PCGS797

Next Month: Exciting details on The Extremely Cool Sweepstakes.

Blue Byte Software, Inc.
870 E. Higgins Road, Suite 143
Schaumburg, IL 60173
Phone (800) 933-2983
Fax: (847) 995-9956

Available: Summer 1997

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Blue Byte

3Dfx would like nothing better than to sew up the 3D video business.

purchased something like a Falcon Northwest system a while back and still want the fastest video benchmarks on the block, you'll want to invest in all-new 2D and 3D cards. First, you replace your existing 2D card with a screamer like Diamond's Stealth 3D 2000 Pro. Then you install a newer, better, faster add-on 3D accelerator.

All-In-One Accelerators

Now that you've figured out that an all-in-one card is right for you, we'll tell you that *PC Games* has been most pleased with the accelerators based on the Rendition Vérité chipset. Why? Because Rendition is one of the few 3D options to rise to the top in a very crowded marketplace. Not only is it a good 2D performer, it is an excellent 3D performer as well—much better than S3 Virge-based 3D cards. More importantly, most developers are designing their upcoming games to access only two 3D accelerator chipsets directly, and one of those is Rendition. Going direct to 3D hardware is important, because it delivers faster 3D frame rates and better 3D picture quality—and you'll want both for modern game performance.

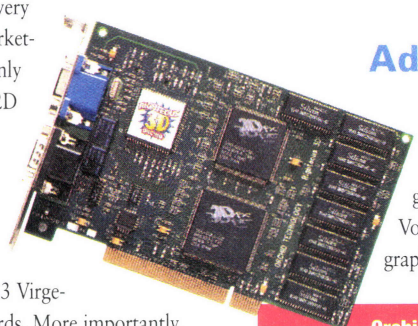
There are other good all-in-one 3D cards. TechWorks' new Ultimate 3D board has what it takes to be a strong contender, but it relies on Microsoft's Direct3D API, a more general software 3D standard, to accelerate games. Great things can be done with Direct3D if developers take the extra time to tweak a game around it. But we expect most D3D games—at least for now—to be quick ports that add good 3D, but not great 3D. Because many games will be written to be specifically compatible with Rendition cards, and Rendition cards are also D3D-compatible, they get the all-in-one nod.

When you begin to shop around, you'll find four Rendition accelerators to choose from. Sierra's Screamin' 3D and Canopus' Total 3D are both made by Canopus; we've been happy with the utility and reliability of the drivers provided with both. You'll pay less for the Sierra version, but Canopus' model comes with extra options, such as a set of 3D glasses. Intergraph's Intense 3D card is also very good, although you may not find it everywhere. Creative's 3D Blaster is a good Rendition product, too, and is widely distributed.

Looking for an all-in-one 3D accelerator? Those using the Rendition chipset are excellent.

Add-On Accelerators

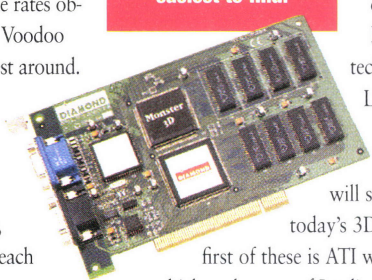
We can't hide our enthusiasm for 3Dfx's Voodoo chipset. As with Rendition's Vérité chipset, developers are writing their games to take direct advantage of 3D Voodoo boards. Even better, Voodoo 3D graphics offer better smoothing and filtering of images for a richer look than you can get from Rendition-based cards. Frame rates obtained with Voodoo accelerators are also some of the highest around.



Orchid makes a Voodoo accelerator called the Righteous 3D.

Right now, you have only two Voodoo options to choose from: Diamond's Monster 3D and Orchid's Righteous 3D. Both are D3D-compatible and are pretty close in features, differing mostly in the suite of drivers each company includes in the box. We can recommend both, but we'll give the nod to Diamond's Monster 3D because of reports that Orchid's product may have driver problems when installed on MMX Pentiums, at least until those conflicts are solved.

A good alternative to the Voodoo cards is an add-on board from VideoLogic called the Apocalypse 3D. This accelerator has already found its way into Compaq's high-end game systems; expect it to turn up in other consumer boxes as well. While the Apocalypse 3D is fast and very capable and supports D3D, we haven't seen as many developers come out and say they're writing their games to work specifically with it as compared to the Voodoo accelerators. Despite this, some high-profile games such as Psygnosis' WipeOut XL are being specifically adapted to the Apocalypse 3D. However, until the balance of direct ports evens out, we still recommend the Voodoo 3D accelerators.



If you're looking for a Voodoo accelerator, Diamond's will be the easiest to find.

End Game

If you go out and shop today, expect any 3D accelerator to cost you just under $200, whether it's an all-in-one or an add-on card. Double your budget if you plan on buying a separate fast 2D card. As with everything in PC gaming, prices will continue to fall and new products will make everything written above obsolete soon after you read it. Before the end of the year, you can expect next-generation versions of the Rendition Vérité chipset, and 3Dfx has enhanced Voodoo technology ready to go. Likewise, other graphics-card companies have better products that will soon be competing with today's 3D leaders. One of the first of these is ATI with its 3D Rage Pro, which makes use of Intel's new accelerator graphics port. By the end of summer, ATI could eclipse Rendition. Stay tuned. ■

Rendition Accelerators

Total 3D
Canopus
www.canopus.com

Intense 3D
Intergraph
www.ingr.com

Screamin' 3D
Sierra On-Line
www.sierra.com

3D Blaster
Creative
www.creaf.com

Voodoo Accelerators

Monster 3D
Diamond Multimedia
www.diamondmm.com

Righteous 3D
Orchid Technology
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Other Accelerators

Apocalypse 3D
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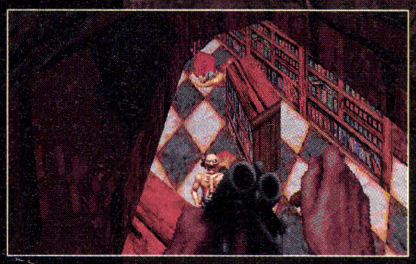

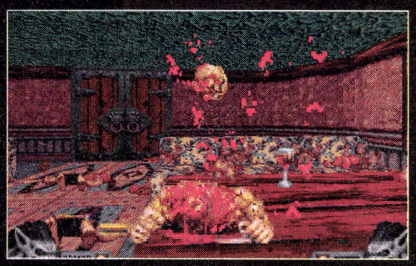

The Critics are Gushing With Praise:

Action! Humor! Atmoshere! Blood does it all with a heavy dose of horror!

-PC Gamer

☆☆☆☆☆

-PC Gaming Review

Excellent level design, brilliant weapons... an excellent addition to the shooting genre.

-Next Generation On-Line

It doesn't get any better than this... Eye Poppin' Demo Award

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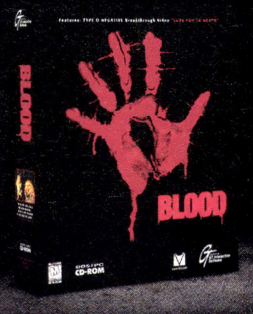

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Master of Orion II
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MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries
(Activision)

MDK
(Playmates Interactive)

The Neverhood
(DreamWorks)

The Pandora Directive
(Access Software)

Quake
(GT Interactive)

Settlers II: Gold Ed.
(Blue Byte)

Syndicate Wars
(Electronic Arts)

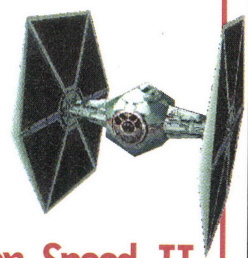
Wing Commander IV
(Origin Systems)

For games we've rated as an A or A- over the past year, admittance to the A-List is the ultimate honor; if it's on this list, it's not just great, it *rocks*. Serious gamers will want all of these titles in their collections. Only the best are good enough for the A-List.

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

Yes, the *PC Games* editors play tons of games, but there are some that we've stuck with beyond the call of duty. Here are the five games we've been playing the most over the past month.

1. X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter
2. Quake
3. MDK
4. Need for Speed II
5. Outlaws



HOW WE RATE GAMES

Here at *PC Games* we use a letter-grade system to rate games. Everyone who's gone to school knows what our grades mean without needing an in-depth explanation or clever chart: an A+ is the best score possible and an F is a complete bust. To give you a better feel for the overall quality of a title, we rate each game in six key areas. We also select a Game of the Month for each issue.

GAME of the MONTH: The *PC Games* Game of the Month is the one title among the month's releases that stands out from the rest. It's generally the best overall game of the month, although occasionally a game will warrant this honor despite its not being rated as highly as some other games because it's a standout in one or more areas.

GAMEPLAY: In a nutshell, how much fun is it to play? This takes into account the quality of the game's interface and control scheme.

GETTING STARTED: How much reading, studying, and hardware-tweaking are required before you can start to have fun? (The less the better.)

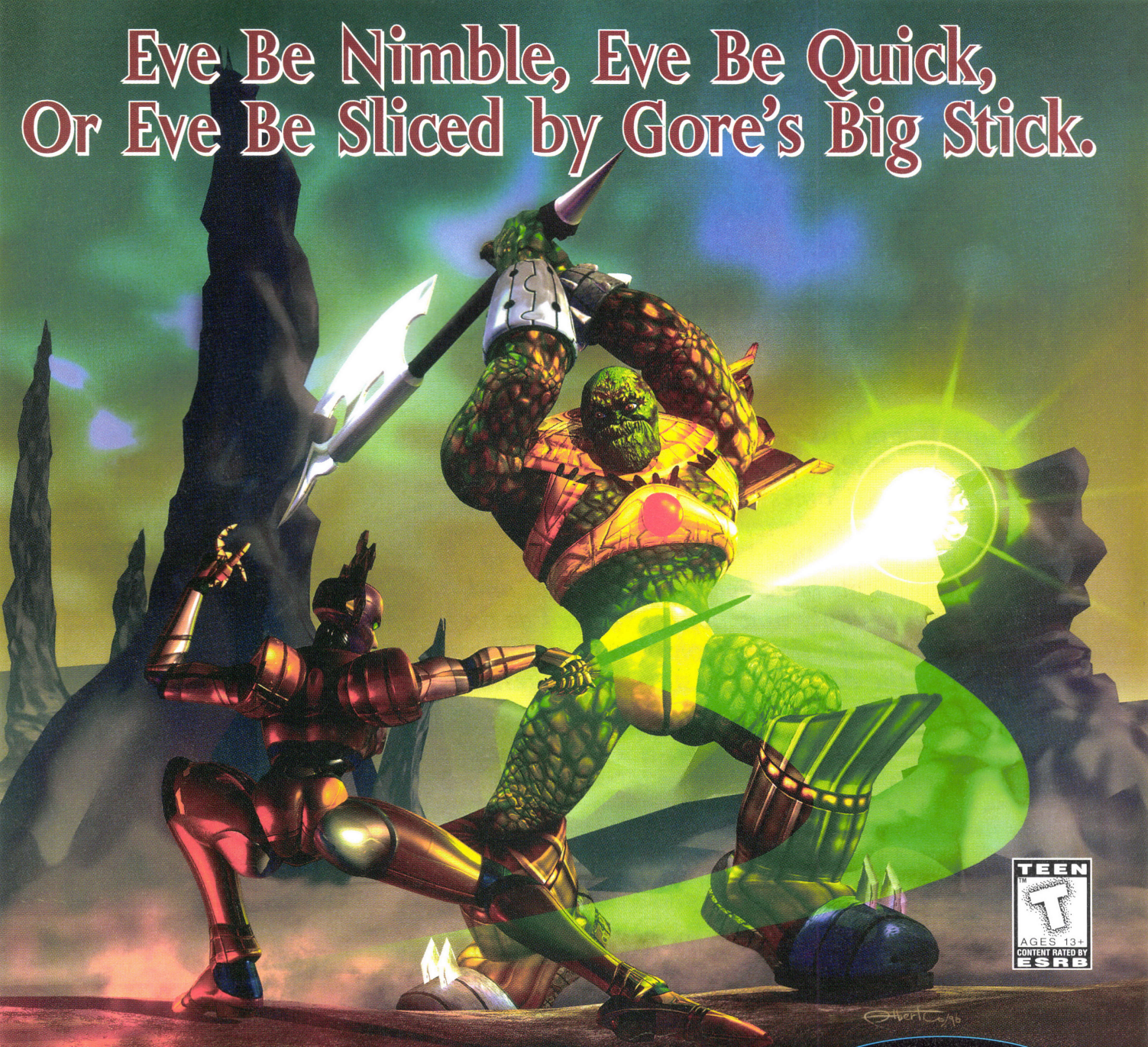
GRAPHICS: How advanced and attractive are the game's visual elements, and how well do they serve the game?

SOUND CHECK: How good are the game's sound effects and musical score, and how well do they serve the game?

OVERALL GRADE: Taking everything into account, how strongly do we recommend the game for purchase?

MULTIPLAYER: How much value will you get from the game's multiplayer element, if there is one? (N/A = not available) This takes into account ease of multiplayer setup. An independent rating.

Eve Be Nimble, Eve Be Quick, Or Eve Be Sliced by Gore's Big Stick.



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Redline: The Continuing Story

By Rob Smith

Artist Jim Meier has created some spectacular artwork aside from that featured in the game. ▼

"It works, honest. Well, it did yesterday." Lead programmer Kris Johnson (right) and AI/networking guru Bruce Johnson try to figure out what's going on. ▶

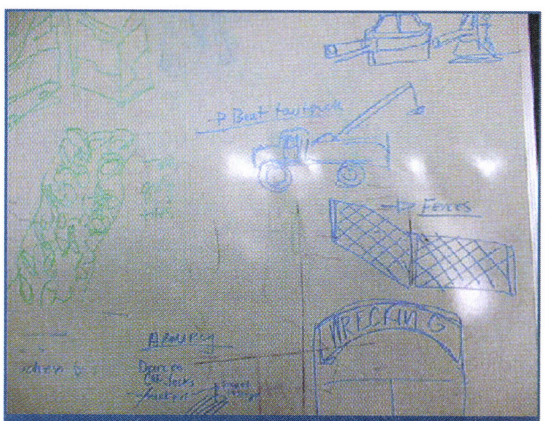
Would you accept a pitch for a game from this man? More to the point, could you say no? ▲

Our story began last issue with the introduction of Redline, Beyond Games' vehicular combat actioner for the next-generation PC. The level-creation and map-building tools have been fully formed, and their potential is only now being explored as the game begins to take shape. Completion is still some way off, but the development story continues...

As any novice Duke Builder or Quake C level editor will tell you, designing game levels is an art. Throwing together a bunch of variously shaped rooms, populated by a menagerie of evil denizens in a mish-mash of corridors and platforms, is not the path to a great game. Yet every level-design utility is restricted by the limitations of its core game engine. You can't create true 3D levels for Duke, because the Build engine can't do it. With Redline, the guys at Beyond Games have their own little level-design quandary: Where do you draw the line when the technology at your fingertips imposes incredibly few restrictions?

Level design heavily affects the storyline, which Beyond sees as key to Redline. As producer Clark Stacey puts it: "There are two areas where we're breaking new ground—the technology and the incorporation of the story into the gameplay. Level design is very egalitarian; everyone is involved in the process."

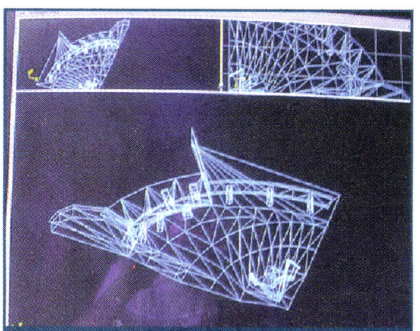
"We have a big meeting for every map," continues Kris Johnson, lead programmer on Redline. "All the ideas are put forward, and then it goes to the artists to change. At least 20 percent of the maps have to be revisited once the details are put in place."



Rather than spending time creating detailed concept art to show the designs, the team uses whiteboards for quick sketches. These ideas are then translated quickly into the game through the scripting engine.

Conversely, the story impacts the outcome of these creative meetings where all the cool map ideas are discussed. "We considering having a large gargoyle spewing flames intermittently over the Coliseum level," says Stacey. "It would take a week of coding, animating, and building him, and then we asked, 'Why would he be there?' There was no cohesive explanation [except] that the engine could cope with it and it would be cool. But it didn't fit with the story, so it was dumped."

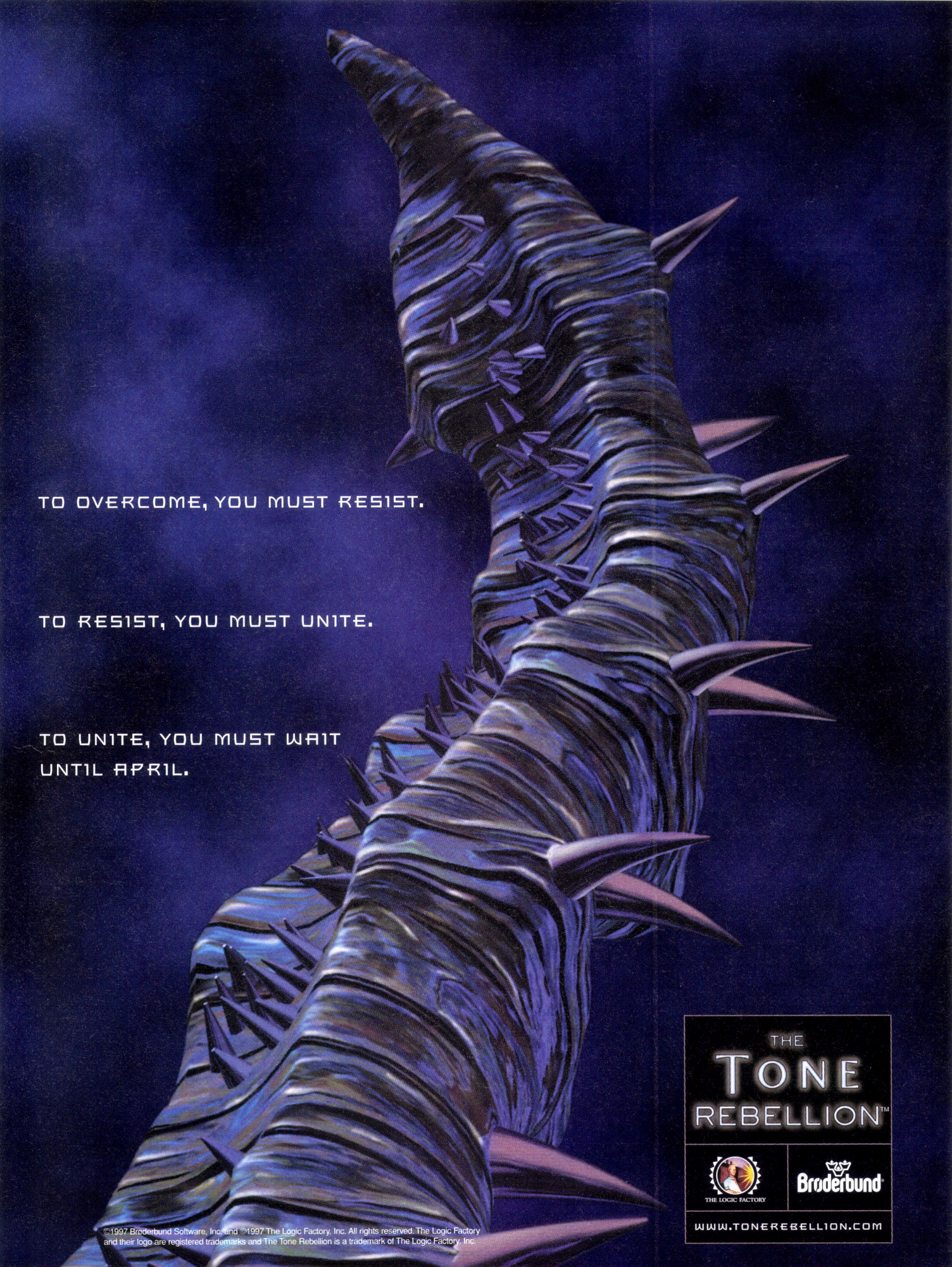
The Beyond crew is currently tweaking mission structures, which can only be finalized once they've incorporated the full physics model into the game engine. As it stands, tweaks to the levels will be necessary when it becomes apparent that the realistic physics model won't allow the cars to make certain jumps or maneuver around tight corners.



The designers render the game's 3D models using Wavefront.

Objects such as barriers surrounding the roads will have their own dynamics; they'll take damage and be weakened by impact. Thus, a likely scenario has car one taking the corner too fast, hitting the barrier and moving on; car two does the same, but the impact from car three is more than the barrier can take, so it breaks and the car hurtles over the edge of a chasm.

Producer Ted Tahquechi, who works for publisher Accolade on the project, adds: "It's important to integrate the car-jacking elements into mission design—having to get out of your car and go to floor three of a building. But while you're in the building, your car might be stolen if it isn't adequately protected with spikes in the steering wheel, remote-control booby-traps to bring thieves to a swift halt, or remote-control ejection seats," which you'll view via a quick cut scene.



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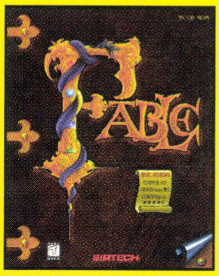

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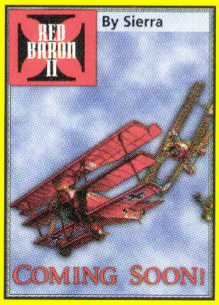

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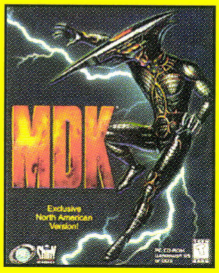

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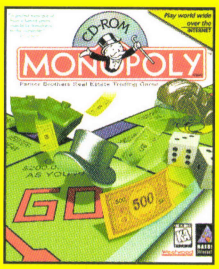

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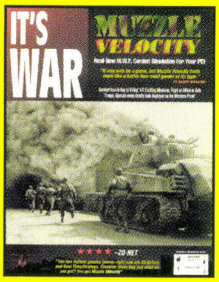

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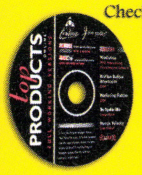

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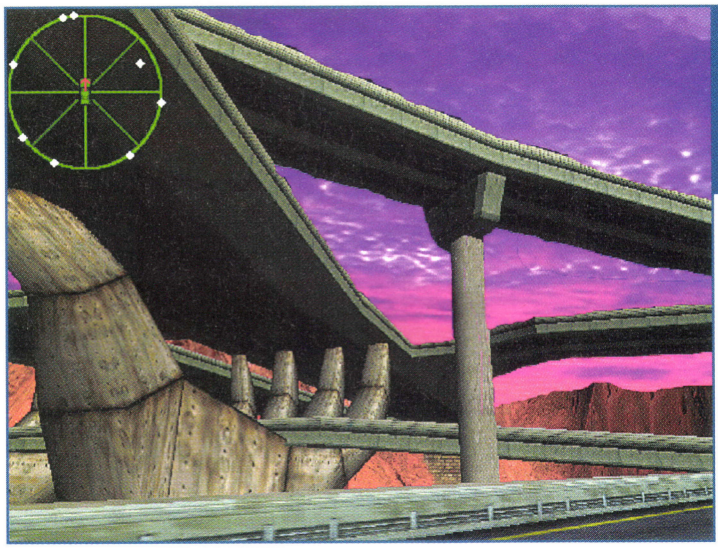


Inter-linked highways that any transport department would be proud of offer great potential for races and chases. The radar in the top left will give you an idea of where any enemies or useful items may be located.

Online Story Development

Designing Redline for play in large online tournaments will be a key focus of development. From a story standpoint, taking part online won't purely be for some small-scale kudos—instead, it will actually affect the game world. A certain level of gang rank progression will be available through the single-player missions, but the idea is for the Redline story to work much like a MUD in that playing in tournaments gives you the chance to ascend further. This won't be just some game ladder; gang leaders will get the opportunity to control the gang's philosophies, know their secrets, make alliances, and really shape a bigger game universe. The two featured gangs, The Red Sixers and The Company, have well-defined agendas, to which the online development of the story will adhere.

Multiplayer throws up its own conundrums, though, which Beyond realizes are tricky to accommodate. "The main problem for latency is that we have four viewpoints to track from each of the views you can look out of the car [forward, backward, and to the left and right]," says Stacey. Also, because the game supports DirectPlay and uses Microsoft's lobby model, the number of packets to be swapped following all the possibilities—including the option to jump out of the car at any point—creates a concern that needs careful consideration.

"We don't pretend that we're going to solve the world's latency problems with Redline's packet transfer; you will end up having better connections to people using a nearby Internet hub, and it's unlikely to be really playable against people scattered all over the world," Stacey says. "But somewhere between our imagination and Accolade's pocket, it will happen."

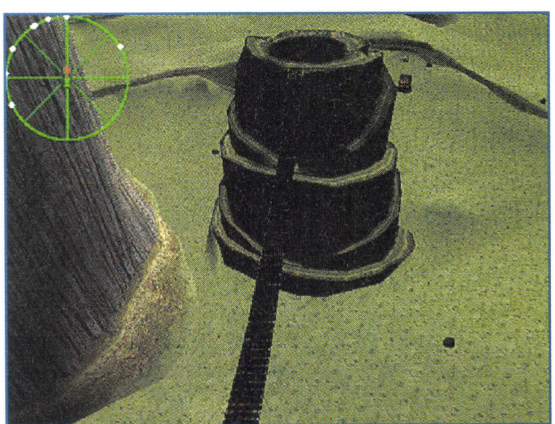
Six players over the Internet and 16 over a LAN are the options currently projected to be ready at ship time. Discussions with the online services are under way, and the idea of a Redline.net server is not out of the question.

Bruce Johnson is charged with making the networking features function, and ensuring that the AI is up to scratch. The latter is a case of making the enemies understand destructible objects and the use of weapons—and each individual enemy is to be given a different character or set of instructions. So if you have two enemy gang members next to each other, perhaps one can shoot only if fired on, while the other can attack anything that enters his line of sight.

What's in a Name?

Ever wondered about the process of naming a game? In Redline's case, Battle Wheels was tried early on, but that title had been used on a Lynx game that Beyond developed years ago and eventually dropped. Clutch, Skulldozer, and Triactor were all nominated, but were finally canned as Redline became the popular choice.

What of its relationship to the story? "Well, that had to be added," Stacey acknowledges. "The competitors in the tournaments all have explosive bands around their necks and each arena is bordered; cross the Redline, and the necklace detonates."



Walk across the rickety bridge, or circle up the side of this huge structure.

The Next Phase

The release date looms, and the team is really cranking on smoothing out the rough edges of level design and mission structure. After that, the physics model will be added, along with AI, for the game to begin taking a more recognizable shape. Explosions need to go in, and the great multiplayer questions need answering. There's still much to do!

Mounted weapons on four sides of the car make multiplay tough, but they sure will add to the action.

Beyond is recruiting four level designers and two other team members as intense testing begins. But the core Beyond Games team members have clear ideas of where Redline is heading and what it means on a personal level; all game development is a labor of love. For Jim Meier, the lead rendering artist, Redline represents "what every 3D artist has ever wanted to do in a game but couldn't because of the technical limitations." The way Kris Johnson sees it: "I've finally managed to include all the concepts of a game that I wanted to. It has everything we wanted from day one, and the technology has allowed us to include all the crazy things we wanted to do."

And the story goes on...

For the first part of our Redline series, and more from Part II, go to our Web site, **www.pcgames.com**.

REDLINE

DEVELOPER:	Beyond Games
PUBLISHER:	Accolade 800-245-7744 www.accolade.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
AVAILABLE:	October 1997

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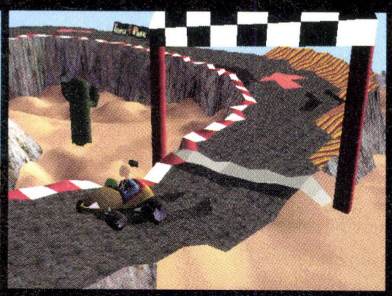

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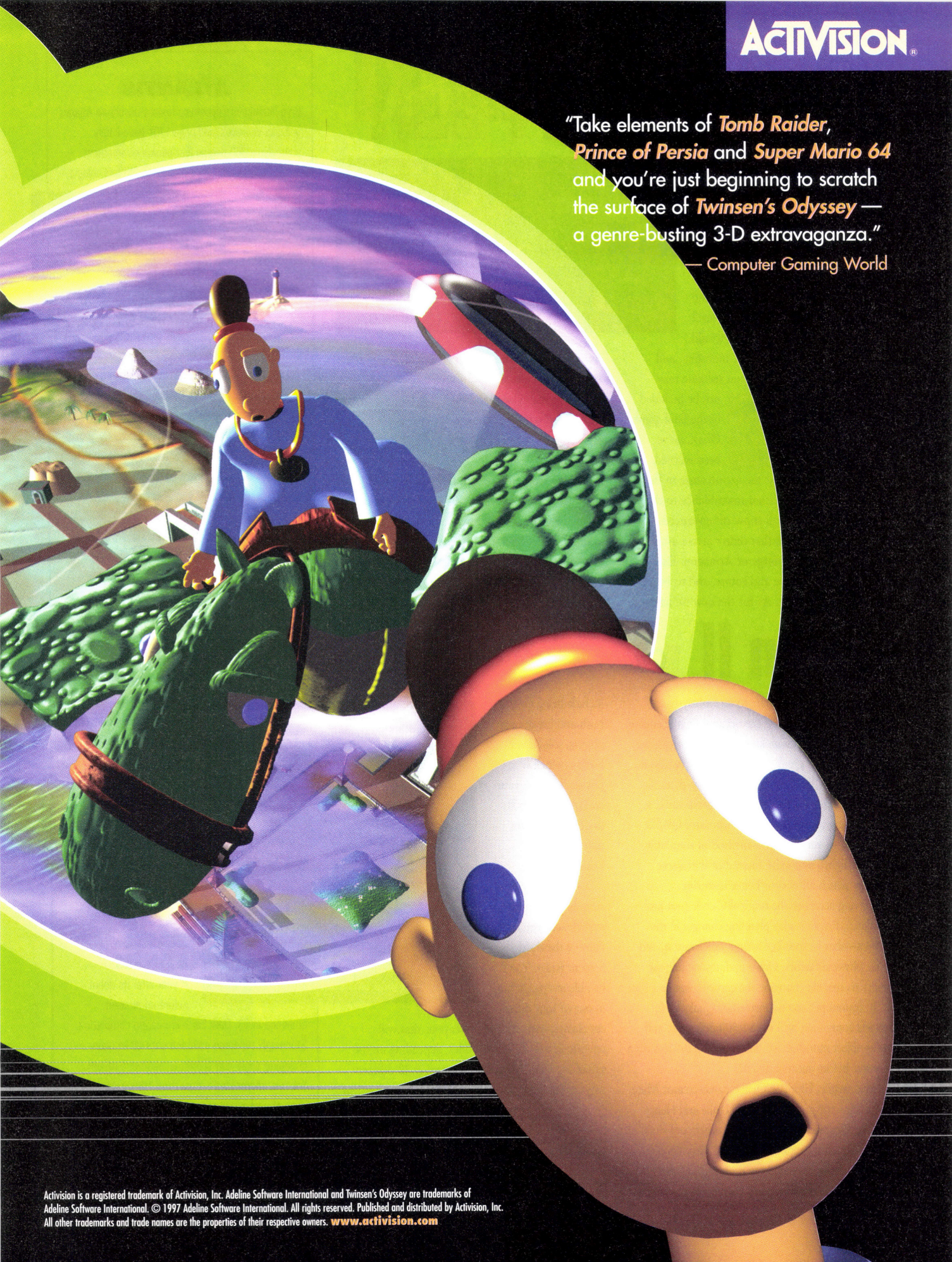

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SNEAK PEEK

Quake 2

In addition to these new foes, the suspension bridge could be one of those new "moving" objects in Quake 2.

One look at this high-resolution, texture-smoothed screenshot provides obvious proof that id has OpenGL 3D acceleration in mind up front for its Quake sequel. id level designer Tim Willits says, "We would like to remind you that levels, monsters, and art change daily, and what you see here may not be included in the final game." Okay, we've been warned.

New monsters, better levels, same lava

Despite the fact that the architecture in these levels bears a strong visual resemblance to the original's, Quake 2 will show off enhanced gadgetry and nuances that didn't arrive until add-on packs like Scourge of Armagon. Expect these gadgets to move and rotate, and to be able to interact with them. As for the new monsters, how many and what they'll all look like is a closely held secret at id. But the cyborg and the new guard with the Klingon-style spinal cord are definitely a step up.

As for story, all we can tell you is what game designer Sandy Petersen told us at the Computer Game Developers Conference in April: "We wanted to get back to a science-fiction theme. It's not going to be space marines a la Doom, but we're definitely going into a different mode with Quake 2." —*George T. Chronis*

QUAKE 2

DEVELOPER:	id Software
WEB:	www.idsoftware.com
AVAILABLE:	October 1997

Hexen II

Quake 1.5? Possibly

Raven Software's update to its fantasy-based action game will use the original Quake engine, but still incorporate some of the new features of the upcoming Quake 2: transparency (without the need for a 3Dfx card), translucency, dynamic scaling to maintain the correct 3D perspective, a new lighting technique that incorporates QRAD (radiosity—a very complex method of simulating ambient light), and mesh instead of wireframe models, which allows for better texturing.

Having access to the original C code (not just QuakeC), Raven is also planning changes in the physics—that is, speed of falling, acceleration, and other physical factors. Other updates include the ability to crouch, changing the game to run at a base of 20 frames per second instead of Quake's 10, models containing well over 1,500 polygons, and multi-object monsters (so you can chop the legs off a monster before decapitating it!).

Meanwhile, Ultimate Quake patch-creator Mike Gummelt—the guy who did the Duke and Henry Rollins skins, various classes, and other cool stuff—is working on weapon tweaks. And Raven is planning AI adjustments, making monsters smarter and giving them unique behavior. Further enhancements include being able to push and break many objects, solid dead bodies (which won't physically get in your way), and the ability to deliver finishing moves, Mortal Kombat–style.

Continuing the storyline of Heretic and Hexen, you'll be fighting the third Serpent Rider. You'll be able to engage him in one of four different classes, each with four weapons that will operate in two different modes, depending on the situation. That makes for an amazing 32 different ways to slaughter foes. —*Christopher Tou*

Egyptian paintings require a powerful engine to model in detail.

HEXEN II

DEVELOPER:	Raven Software
PUBLISHER:	Activision
WEB:	www.activision.com
AVAILABLE:	September 1997

ATLANTIS

Cryo Interactive's upcoming fantasy adventure Atlantis will, like Versailles (see page 170), have a fully controllable 360-degree first-person environment thanks to the company's proprietary 3D technology, OMNI. You play Seth, a heroic young lad in search of the fabled Atlantis. The quest features more than 100 "chapters" in five different environments. Each location has an individual culture, and its denizens respond to Seth differently, providing help or hindrance. More than 50 animated 3D characters, each voiced with real-time lip-synch, will help you unearth the secrets.

BLOOD OMEN: LEGACY OF KAIN

Activision is preparing to release a port of this Crystal Dynamics–developed PlayStation action/adventure, in which players assume the role of a vampire. A great cinematic opening sets the scene for an engaging plot that twists and turns as it guides you to the secret of ending your bloodlust. All the while, you'll explore sinister dungeons and crypts in a unique isometric view. The action is typically bloody, and the developers are throwing in puzzles to add a cerebral edge to the action. Get an early look by checking out the demo on PC Games.exe.

DARK EARTH

A year after its debut before an amazed audience at E3, Dark Earth is nearing completion. Stunningly rendered environments make every changing angle and screen an aesthetic dream. You can interact with more than 100 characters, each of whom will respond to you based on the demeanor of your character (hostile or civil) when you ask them questions. Can you save the world from complete, utter darkness? Find out this October.

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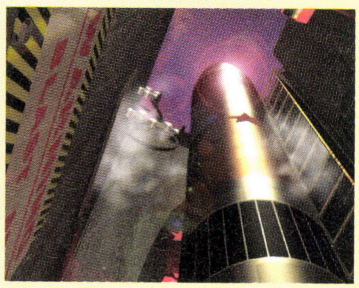

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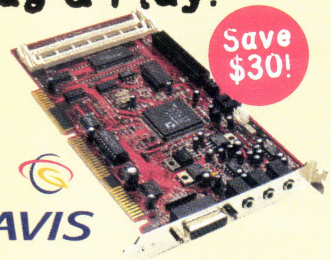

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SNEAK PEEK

MechWarrior 3

Expect to see a greater emphasis on terrain during mission planning in MechWarrior 3.

It was announced last year that FASA's MechWarrior franchise was moving to MicroProse, and it's taken about that long for the reality to sink in. Let's face it: Activision did a wonderful job with Mech 2, and the publisher's strong mercenary streak succeeded in porting the game to just about every graphic card and game platform imaginable. Meeting such high expectations won't be easy for MicroProse, but early indications are that this publisher has some grand plans for MechWarrior 3.

Can you say MUNGA?

The new game is being built upon the same BattleTech universe that has been evolving for 15 years, and will make use of FASA's MUNGA technology, which is used at Virtual World centers.

Like MechWarrior 2 and Mercenaries, drivers can tweak their mounts, but the level of customizability will be greater in MechWarrior 3. Players can now scavenge recent battlefields for useful equipment to augment and repair their mechs. In addition, you can apply unique colors and battle emblems from an extensive library provided in the game; if these are not enough, players can design their own. The other area that has been opened up is mission design. Players now have control over mission targets and tactical planning.

MECHWARRIOR 3

PUBLISHER:	MicroProse
WEB:	www.microprose.com
AVAILABLE:	June 1998

MicroProse won't say how many people will be able to battle it out over LANs or the Internet, but we're hoping it's 16 or more. —*George T. Chronis*

Flying Nightmares II

Typically, when a game tries to take on multiple personalities—part action, part role-playing, for example—it fails at both. Flying Nightmares 2, however, aims to offer an aggressive flight-sim design that incorporates a full-bore strategy game.

The first thing you'll notice are the amazing graphics. Support for Direct3D, 3Dfx, Rendition, PowerVR, and MMX out of the gate, is all aimed at ensuring that FN II is on the cutting edge in the looks department.

The sim includes one campaign with 24 missions in which you fly both an AV-8B Harrier 2 assault plane and an AH-1W Cobra attack helicopter to help quell an uprising in Cuba. Each craft will include a hot-looking virtual cockpit designed to enhance your perhipheral vision in the air. "Flight sims have reached a point of stagnation; we want to bring a new experience to the table," producer Bryan Walker says.

Part flight sim, part strategy game

Commandant is the real-time strategy-game side. You'll be able to play in single and multiplayer games with up to 16 players, divided into two teams in a single game. Each team will have a "commandant" who will direct the action, issuing orders to computer and human-controlled units alike.

Units will have to contend with real-life issues such as line of sight, and respond to orders such as entrench, hide, charge, suppress and bypass, and defend. Each commandant will assign targets for player-controlled human pilots to take out.

You'll be able to broadcast your own Internet games and find other games via a slick included utility that mimics QuakeWorld, and it's also likely that FN II will appear on one or more of the Internet gaming services.

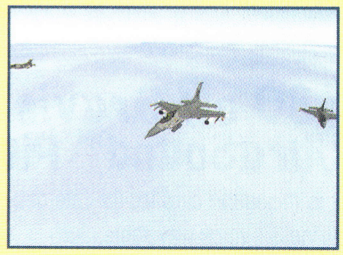
—*Steve Klett*

FLYING NIGHTMARES II

DEVELOPER:	Wolfpack/Eidos
PUBLISHER:	Eidos Interactive
WEB:	www.eidos.com
AVAILABLE:	September 1997

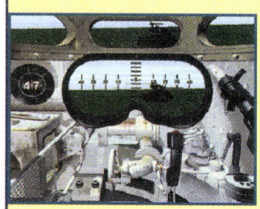
iF-16 VIPER

In a refreshing change from the F-22 sims craze, I-Magic and Digital Integration are teaming up on iF-16 Viper for release this fall. iF-16 Viper sports 30 total missions in 3 campaigns set in Korea, Israel, and Cyprus. Like Hind and Apache, Viper will allow head-to-head play over a modem, plus LAN play for up to 16 players.



iPANZER '44

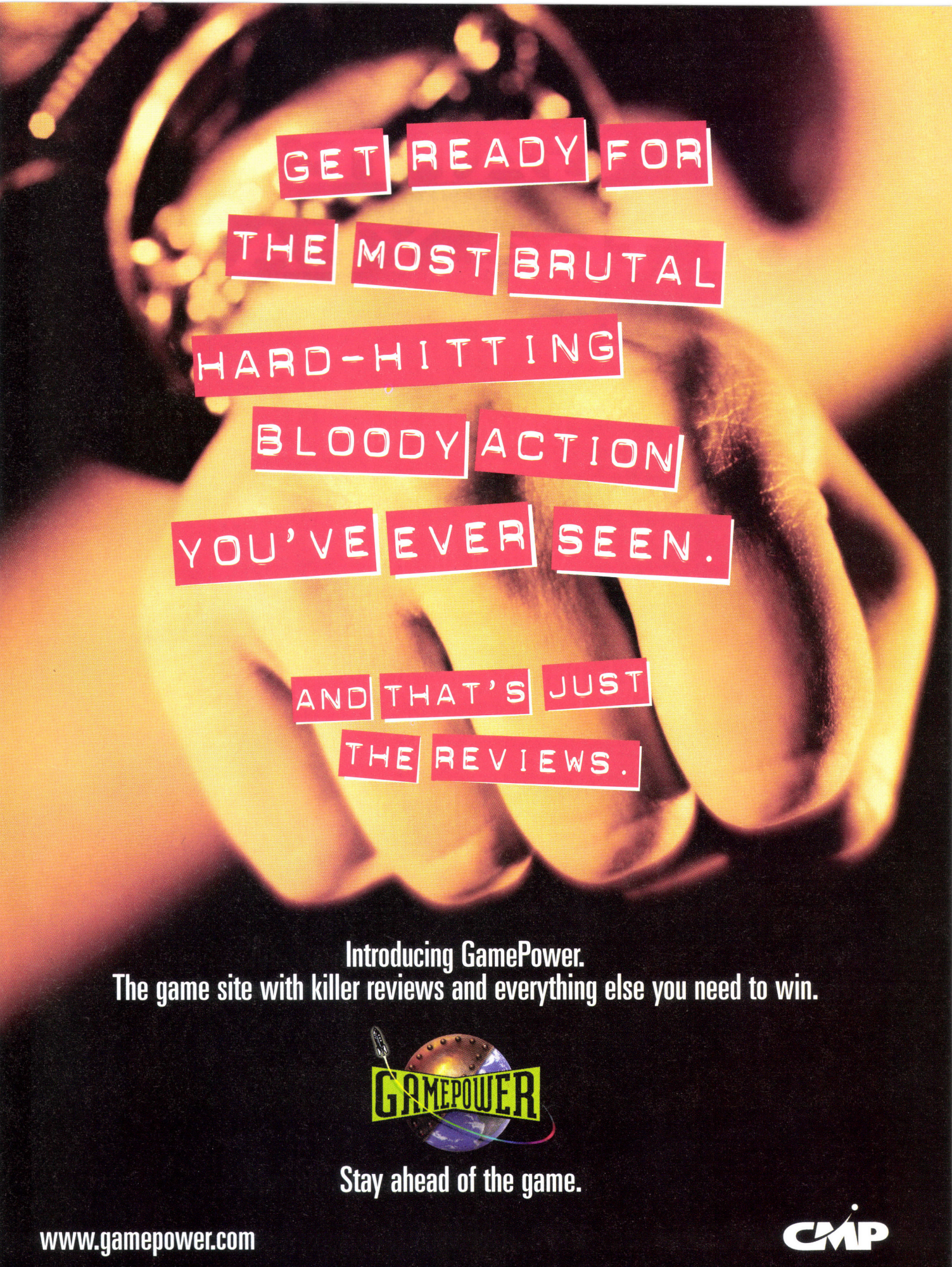
Fresh off the heels of its iM1A2 Abrams release, I-Magic is planning another tank-busting game, and this time the theatre is WWII. Designed by the Abrams team, iPanzer '44 will contain a new terrain engine and allow players to control an American (Sherman), Russian (T-34), or German (Panther) tank. You'll be able to shoot it out head-to-head via modem or over a LAN with seven other people. iPanzer '44 should be out by Christmas.



SHATTERED REALITY

Now for something completely different from I-Magic: a new "hovercraft" shooter called Shattered Reality. Heavy on explosive action, Shattered Reality will feature detailed graphic effects such as special source lighting when weapons are fired. The game will support various 3D graphics accelerators, and offer both head-to-head and LAN play for up to eight people.

Fly both the Harrier jet and Cobra attack helicopter.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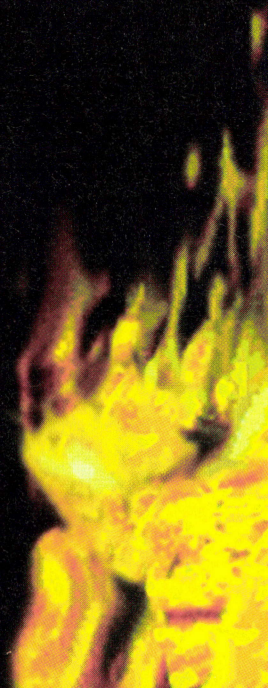

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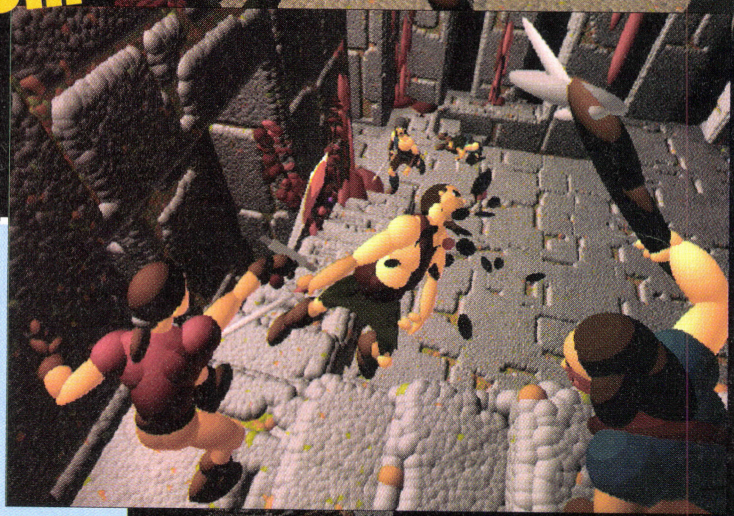

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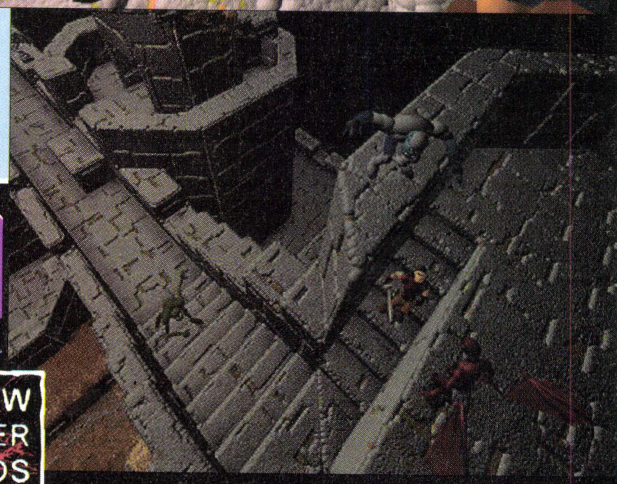

Please clip and send your answers to:
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PSYGNOSIS

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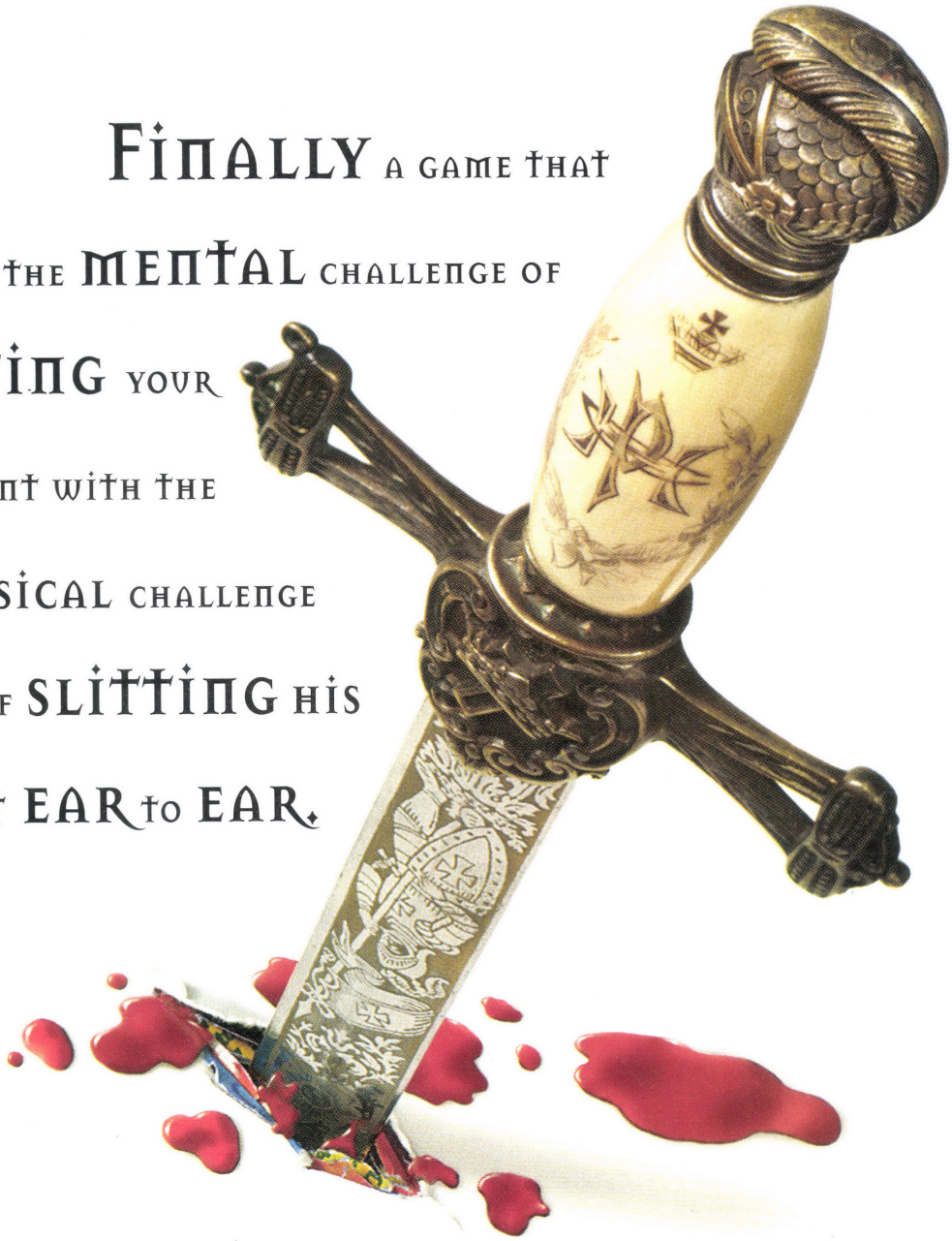

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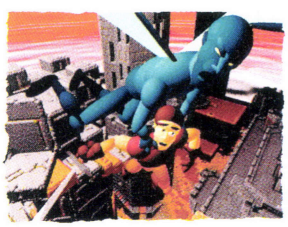

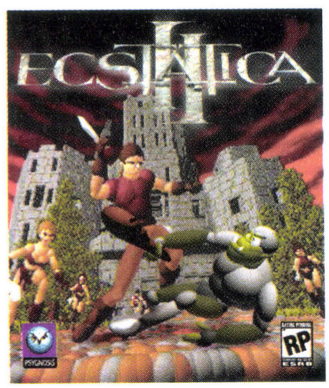

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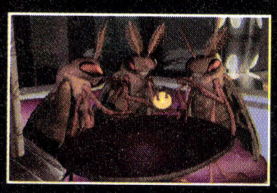

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SNEAK PEEK

MIXED BAG

STAR TREK: SECRET OF VULCAN FURY

Trek fans, rejoice: The original series lives on, as a regular writer from that era, D.C. Fontana, has been given the chance to "write the *Trek* story you always wanted to." The result is a take on the origins of the Romulan/Vulcan split and includes all the old cast members—each taking the lead role in one of the six missions. A new rendering package creates phenomenally realistic characters, as all the old *Trek* actors are lip-synched for authenticity. The mission style follows each crew member's character; thus, Kirk's is action-based, Bones' is more analytical, and Sulu's has a navigation flavor. The continuing saga of the NCC-1701 should be out in time for Christmas.

EXTREME TACTICS

If you're done with real-time strategy, keep an eye out for this tactical combat game. Media Station's Extreme Tactics promises highly advanced AI flexibility. Players control either the Hammerhawk or Bloodfox clan; 11 missions serve as the core single-player story. Twenty-five maps offer plenty of diversity, but the key is the variation in fighting techniques, with one clan favoring frontal attacks and others employing cunning. The slick-looking interface will allow unit strengths and tactics to be adjusted on the fly. Armor, weapon, and speed ratings are also adjustable for the units that you can design to counter a specific tactic of your enemy. A map editor will add to the longevity, aided by four-player LAN and Internet support. Extreme should be on the shelves by—surprise!—Christmas.

TFX3: F-22

Well known for the excellent flight sim EF2000, Digital Image Design finally has another sim in the works. Joining the rest of the F-22 sims is the tentatively titled TFX3: F-22. Key features include texture-mapped landscapes and a hugely realistic flight model. Missions are set in the Middle East theater, and in addition to flying and fighting in the F-22, the game will include the chance to sit at the tactical controls of an E-3 Sentry AWACS aircraft. From there, you'll view ground-based conflicts and aerial dogfights alike. With the TFX team's reputation, this is one to watch as the battle for control of the F-22 skies commences.

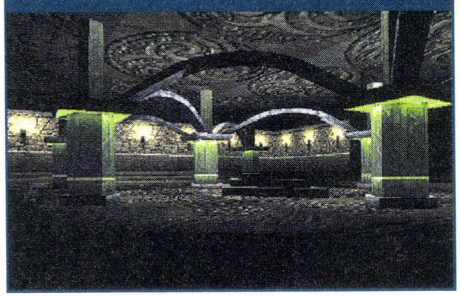
Redguard

"Don't call it a Tomb Raider clone"

Bethesda has scored big with the Elder Scrolls stories, which reached a staggering scope with Daggerfall. Now the company is looking to further use the backdrop of the Tamriel game world, but develop it in different directions. The Elder Scrolls Adventures: Redguard is the first of these. Taking place on an island just out of the Daggerfall playing area, this 3D action/adventure incorporates a detailed town to explore. Using the X^{n}gine, Redguard offers a compelling third-person perspective, which helps give a sense of scale to the detailed texturing of the game environment.

The Elder Scrolls: Battlespire is another work-in-progress that uses the X^{n}gine to create a light-sourced dungeon environment. This first-person game incorporates quality artwork for the quest's characters, as well as some original concepts in level and story design. RPG elements will play a key role, although more details will emerge as the project nears its Christmas completion date. —*Rob Smith*

Battlespire's detailed X^{n}gine can produce excellent lighting effects.



REDGUARD

PUBLISHER:	Bethesda
WEB:	www.bethsoft.com
AVAILABLE:	October 1997

Star Trek: First Contact

Last month, we told you about the good things Epic MegaGames has built into Unreal. That's why Star Trek fans will be happy to note that Visionary Media has licensed the Unreal engine to create a first-person 3D adventure based on the *Star Trek: First Contact* movie. MicroProse will release the game sometime next year, but even this early in development it's obvious First Contact is going to go where no *Star Trek* game has gone before.

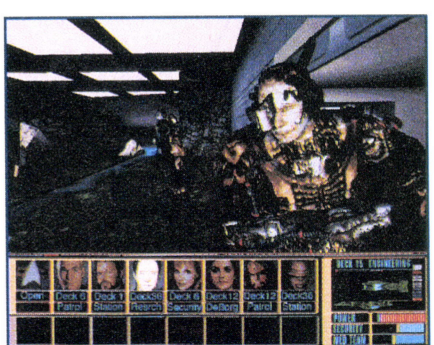
The Unreal engine has been assimilated

As in the movie, the Borg are back and attempting to assimilate the latest *Enterprise* and her crew. In a deck-by-deck 3D re-creation, players will battle with the Borg for control of the *Enterprise-E*, level by level. Although players start with standard-issue hand and rifle phasers, the Borg AI adapts quickly, and you'll have to use the ship's computer to evaluate captured Borg technology to develop new, more effective weapons. Unlike Star Trek: Generations, players are encouraged to blast away at as many Borg as they can find—it's war, and Federation ethics be damned.

While we expected the solo game to encourage taking on the personas of Capt. Picard, Cmdr. Riker, Lt. Cmdr. Worf, and Cmdr. Data, developer Visionary is adding the ability to adopt different crew personalities in multiplayer games for greater individuality. Thanks to the Unreal engine, First Contact could prove to be the first fast-action *Star Trek* shooter. We can't wait. —*George T. Chronis*

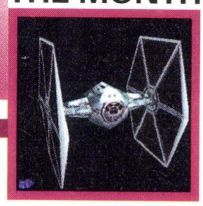
STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT

DEVELOPER:	Visionary
PUBLISHER:	MicroProse
WEB:	www.microprose.com
AVAILABLE:	June 1998



Unreal's engine has been harnessed to provide exceptional 3D detail in First Contact.

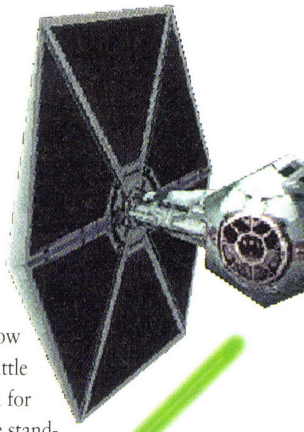
GAME OF THE MONTH



X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter

By Steve Klett

You can fly any one of nine different *Star Wars* craft. The X-Wing is my personal favorite.



PC GAMES A LIST

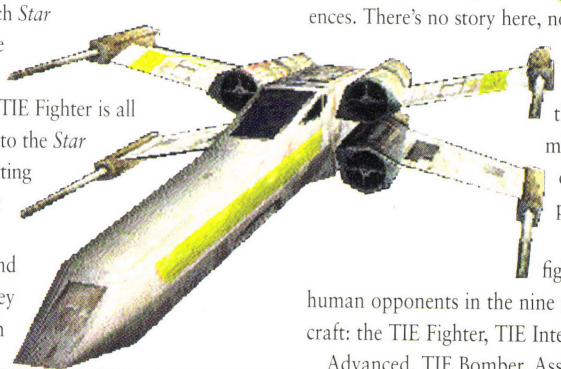
A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...before the much-anticipated arrival of X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter—I had frequent arguments with a fellow PC Games *staff member about the virtues of flying for the Empire or the Alliance.*

This staffer, who refers to himself as "Dark Jedi," boasted there was no Rebel ship he could not best with a simple TIE Fighter—the backbone of the Imperial fleet. He particularly liked to pick on the "woeful" attributes of the X-Wing (my ship of choice).

The best Star Wars *game yet*

I refused to cave to Dark Jedi's invitations to join the Empire or "pay the consequences." Instead, I waited patiently for the arrival of X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter, and then repeatedly handed him his lunch in a series of games—piloting an X-Wing victoriously against not only the lowly TIE Fighter, but every Imperial ship he chose.

The above scenario is the real-life fruition of a *Star Wars* fantasy shared by so many gamers (a fantasy perhaps only bested by the one depicted on a recent episode of *Friends*). That fantasy is, of course, to act out the memorable scenes you watched so many times in the movies, and settle—once and for all—those arguments you had with your friends about which side of the Force is stronger and which *Star Wars* ships are the best. This is what X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter is all about: jumping into the *Star Wars* universe, pitting your skills against your friends (or total strangers), and putting your money where your mouth has been since Star Wars debuted in 1977.



Sure, until now you could do battle in grand fashion for either side in the standalone games X-Wing and TIE Fighter. However, no matter how well you did in those games, the lack of multiplayer left those arguments up in the air. Enter X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter, which lives up to the heritage of its forebears and earns a permanent place on my hard drive—and a nomination for multiplayer game of the year.

That said, don't look for X-Wing vs. TIE to match the previous games' single-player experiences. There's no story here, no Death Star or Rebel HQ to destroy. In fact, of the game's 50-plus missions, only 16 are designed with solo play in mind. It's all about fighting against real human opponents in the nine modeled *Star Wars* craft: the TIE Fighter, TIE Interceptor, TIE Advanced, TIE Bomber, Assault Gunboat, X-Wing, A-Wing, Y-Wing, and Z-95 Headhunter. The only real choices you have to make are which side to fight for, the Rebellion or the Empire (a choice you probably made years ago), and which ship to fly (ditto).

Few gaming thrills can match skimming the massive surface of a Star Destroyer in a Y-Wing as you frantically dodge laser fire and incoming missiles.

Two to eight players can square off on a network, and up to four players can fly together over the Internet. If you don't have access to a network, you'll find hundreds of willing opponents and/or partners on Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone, which scored the exclusive rights to host LucasArts games online. (You can also host or join Internet games independent of IGZ, a la Quake, if you know the IP address of the host computer.)

Network games are incredibly fast, and incredibly fun. Because

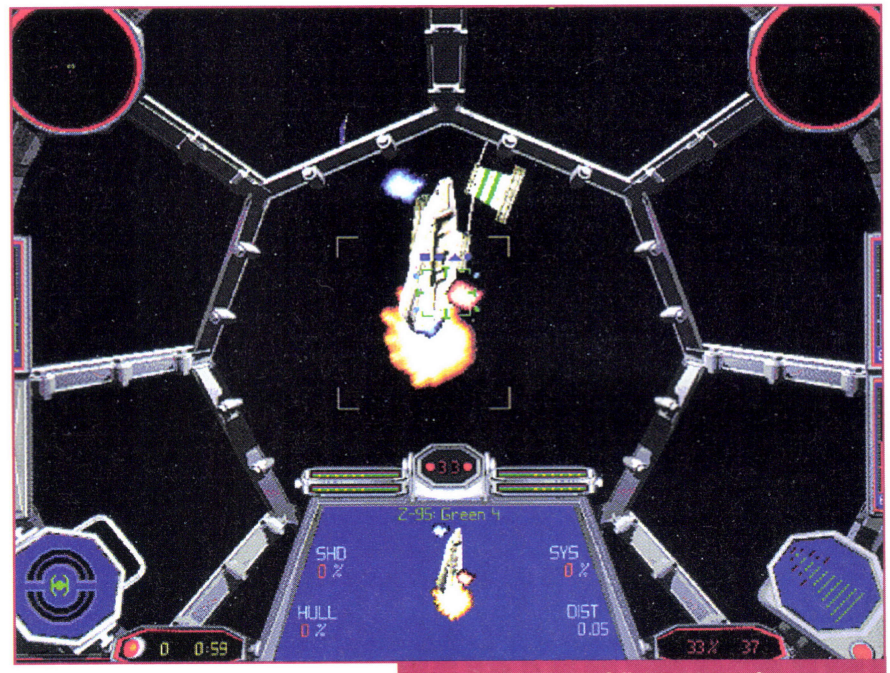
the Internet can't match a local network's performance, this is where you'll find the best playing experience. Still, I took part in a dozen or so online games and found the amount of lag acceptable almost across the board; only two games were affected to the point where they weren't much fun.

Whether you play on LAN, Internet, or modem-to-modem, X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter offers a plethora of options that lend the game a virtually infinite replay value. You can fly in a Melee (read: deathmatch) with or without missiles, with or without computer-controlled wingmen, or with or without human teammates. You can form a team and square off against other teams in the multitude of co-op missions offered. There's even Tournament play, where you take part in a series of three massive furballs (dogfights), with the pilot achieving the best overall score deemed the winner. You and your teammates can also challenge another team to a Battle, where the first team to win three out of five random missions is the victor. The bottom line: you'll be playing this game for a long, long time.

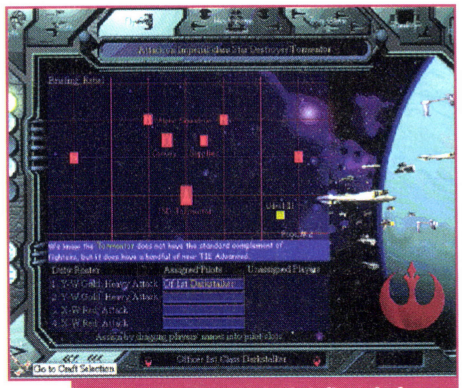
Even the single-player aspects of X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter deserve notice, thanks to vastly improved AI. X-Wing vs. TIE's computer-piloted craft are more difficult to defeat this time around—much more difficult.

The game also boasts an extensive stat-tracking and scoring engine, which takes the relative strengths and weaknesses of your craft and those you fly against into account, as well as the skill of the pilots you fight. Jump into a Melee as a newbie in the TIE Fighter (which has no shields) and shoot down an X-Wing (which has shields), and you'll be rewarded with more points than its pilot would get for killing you—even more points if the X-Wing's pilot is more experienced.

X-Wing vs. TIE tracks the amount of time each player has spent with the game via rank, of which there are 25. You can progress up to 15 ranks in the solo-player missions, but you'll have to earn the rest in multiplayer games. However, you can't build up your experience easily by killing newbies; you won't get any promotion points for defeating players more than four ranks below you.



Another Rebel scum falls to your precise gunnery.



Pay attention to the briefings before each mission: they do offer valuable info from time to time.

X-Wing vs. TIE tracks a serious number of combat statistics to determine which pilots are the strongest in the Force.

The game scores extremely well in every technical category as well. The 16-bit SVGA graphic overhaul blows away TIE Fighter and X-Wing: the dynamic lighting effects are particularly cool, especially in 65,000 colors. Of course, to fly with all the detail options turned on, you'll need at least a Pentium 133 and 24MB of RAM, but the game does perform well on the minimum required platform in 256-color mode, which is still very impressive. And the sound is truly incredible, with John Williams' movie scores streaming off the CD, accompanied by laser blasts and other effects that sound like they're taken right out of the re-released movies.

The only bones I can pick with X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter are the inability to save in the middle of a tournament or battle, which can take more than a hour to complete, and the limit of two people who can play off a single copy of the game (a master CD and multiplayer-only CD are included with each game). But those are pretty small bones when you've been to a multiplayer feast this bountiful.

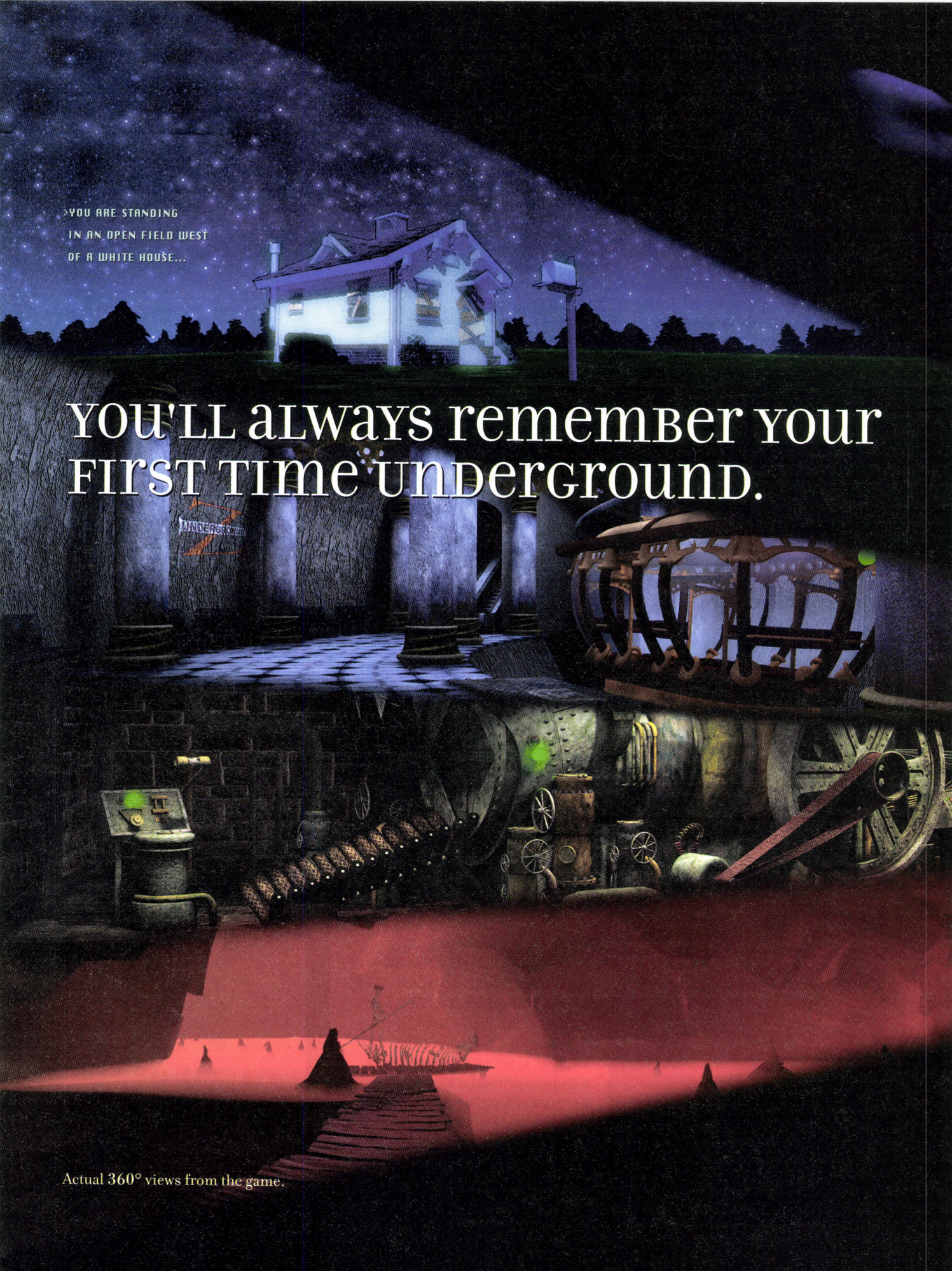
X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER

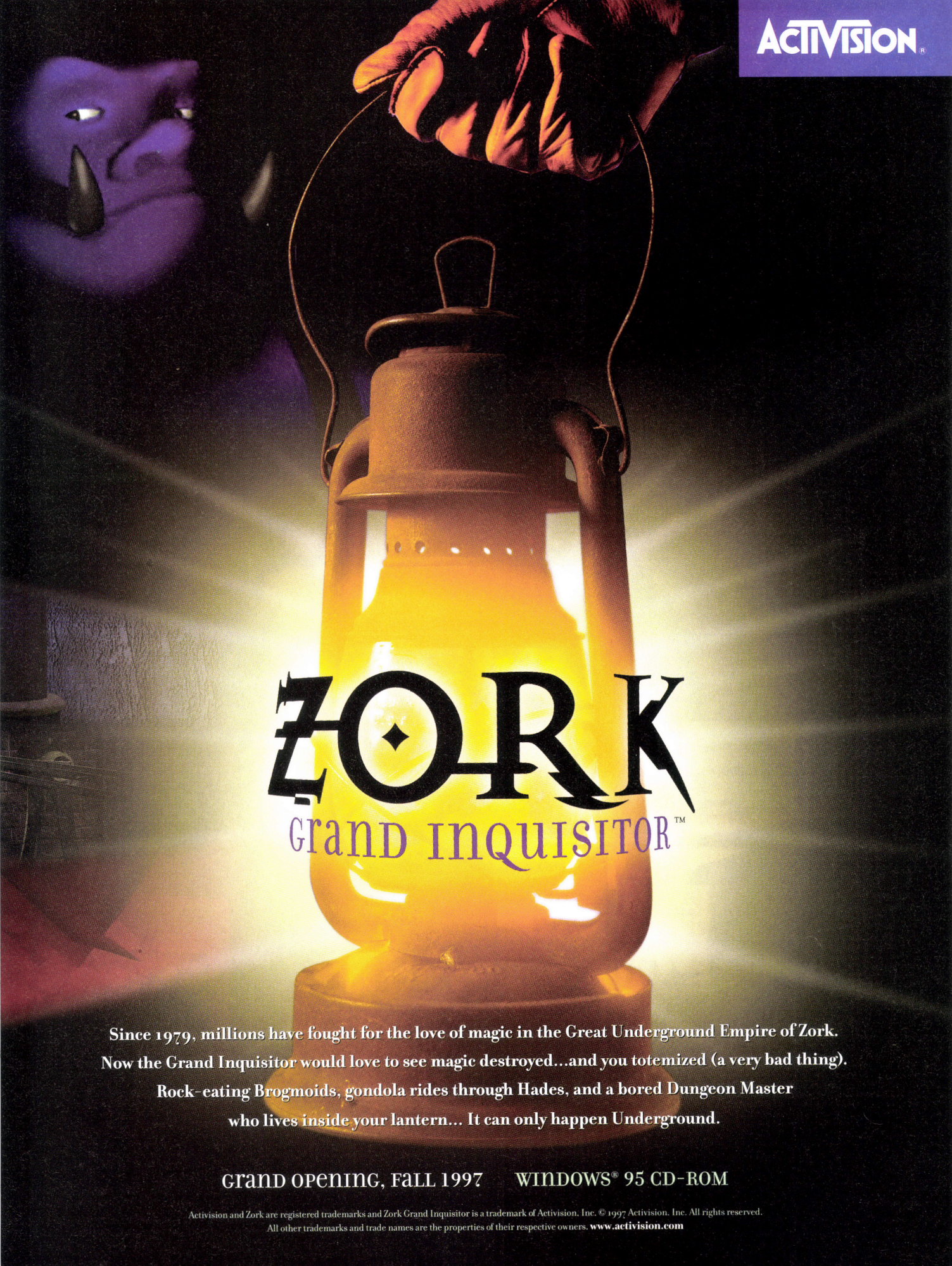
GAMEPLAY:	A+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	A+
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	A+

Multiplayer games don't get better than this.

PUBLISHER:	LucasArts 800-782-7927
WEB:	www.lucasarts.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 3MB HD, 2X CD-ROM drive, PCI graphics card, sound card, joystick
MULTIPLAYER:	P100 for LAN/modem play, P133 for Internet play
RECOMMENDED:	P133+, 24MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Playing through all the missions by yourself will pay off big-time in LAN, modem, and Internet play. ▼ A rapid series of twisting high-speed turns—firing countermeasures, if you've got 'em—is the best way to avoid missiles. ▼ Knowing the handling characteristics of all of your opponents' ships is crucial for success. ▼ He who does not link his weapons is usually weaker in the Force. ▼ He who flies full-throttle all the time is an easy mark–unless he's in an A-Wing.


>YOU ARE STANDING
IN AN OPEN FIELD WEST
OF A WHITE HOUSE...
YOU'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER YOUR
FIRST TIME UNDERGROUND.
Actual 360° views from the game.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"Extremely Addictive! If you want a modern flight sim, look no further."

–MacHome Journal

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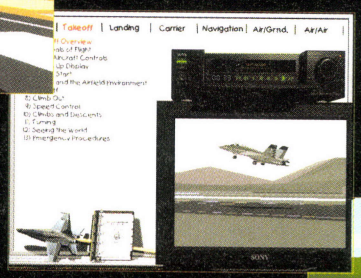
–Mac Action



1996 MAC HOME JOURNAL READERS' CHOICE

1996 MAC HOME JOURNAL READERS' CHOICE

GRAPHIC SIMULATIONS CORPORATION

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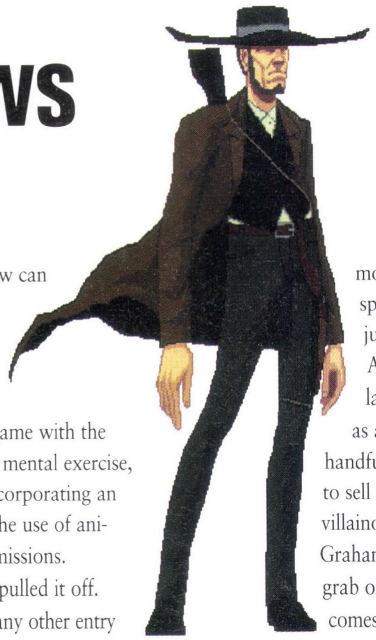
Outlaws

Tombstones and tumbleweed

ACTION

By Daniel Morris



It's the kind of premise few can resist—an action shooter set against the cinematic backdrop of Sergio Leone's epic West. LucasArts set about its new first-person game with the distinct goal of providing a mental exercise, emphasizing tactics, and incorporating an epic western plot through the use of animated cut scenes between missions.

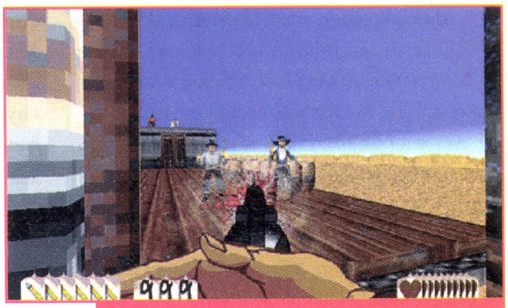
For the most part, they pulled it off.

Outlaws is quite unlike any other entry in the first-person-shooter glut, and that alone makes it noteworthy. For starters, the emphasis is as much on staying alive as it is on killing. This outlook is mirrored by your enemies, who are very interested in saving their hides and will duck for cover, flee into buildings, take potshots at you from hiding holes...anything but stand still for a fair fight.

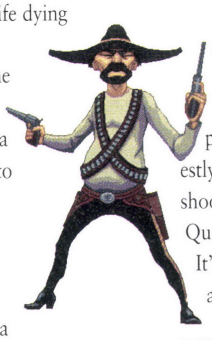
To make matters even more interesting, the tools at hand are 19th-century vintage: six-shooters, rifles, shotguns, dynamite, and a wicked (but only semi-portable) Gatling gun. Of course, these not-so-cutting-edge weapons come complete with a sobering ammunition limit, making furious reloading as much a part of a gunfight as strafing.

Unfortunately, the primitive weaponry is accompanied by a primitive game engine—and that's a step backward we don't need. Outlaws is powered by a decidedly anachronistic update of the Dark Forces engine. It looks like BUILD, but plays slower. The sprite-based, 2D-faked-like-3D graphics are no improvement on Duke Nukem 3D.

Cinematic cut scenes provide an appropriately moody setting for this spaghetti fable of frontier justice. Marshall James Anderson, a retired lawman trying to make it as a farmer, is among a handful of citizens who refuse to sell their property to the villainous "Gentleman" Bob Graham as he attempts a land grab of the entire county. Anderson comes home one day after a ride into town and finds his wife dying and his daughter kidnapped.



You and your trusty six-shooter against a trainful of bandits. Odds, anyone?



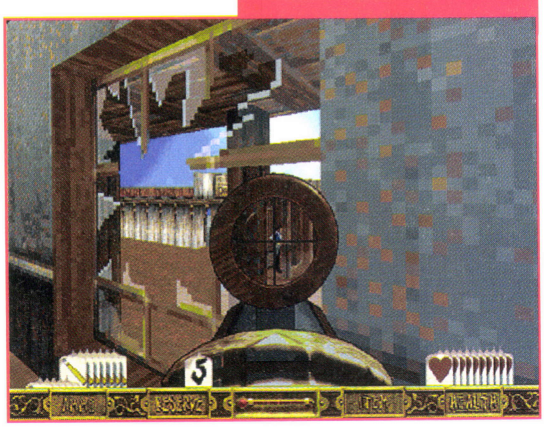
Needless to say, they picked the wrong man to mess with. Faster than a tumbleweed rolls through a ghost town, Anderson shows up to teach these scoundrels what one motivated lawman and his trusty peacemakers can do.

Among the missions are a shootout aboard a runaway train, a fight through the tunnels and tracks of a quarry, a night battle in the town, and a bold assault on a heavily guarded fort. Each level presents one of Graham's creepy underlings as a boss to further impede the search for your daughter.

As solid as the single-player story is, Outlaws really shines in multiplayer mode. You'll be surprised at how deliberate and methodical the action is, particularly in the larger levels—a refreshing break from the typical "run like a gazelle spraying rockets" deathmatch. Intricate architectural gags and the limited capacities of your weapons put a premium on care and caution. Sniping is not only encouraged, but a fact of life, thanks to your rifle's sniper scope.

Perhaps the best thing about Outlaws' multiplayer mode is that it's ideal for team play. One great level provides a fort assault scenario that will pit two competing teams in a remarkably involved battle to secure the structure. Ammunition, medical bags, boiler-plate armor, and other assorted pick-ups are hard to come by, and more often than not you'll find yourself stuck in jams where only quick thinking will save your bacon.

Play fair? A sniper scope is the great equalizer.



Its game engine may be antiquated, its graphics pixelated, and its sound uninspiring (although the twangy Western music is right on the mark), but Outlaws has one major plus: it's the only game thus far that can honestly claim to be "the thinking man's first-person shooter." It isn't a flashy technical clinic like Quake, and thank goodness it isn't trying to be. It's just an old-fashioned, matchstick-chewin' adventure game. Leone would be proud.

OUTLAWS

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	C+
SOUND CHECK:	B

B OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: B+

Smart, stylish, and fun, if technologically primitive.

PUBLISHER:	LucasArts 800-985-8227
WEB:	www.lucasarts.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P60, 16MB RAM, 59MB HD space, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P90 or better for multiplayer, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ To even up the odds in multiplayer mode, let the weaker player start off with Gentleman Bob. He respawns with a double-barreled shotgun, which is a big advantage indeed. ▼ Be sure to climb into wells and swim down to see what surprises might be waiting at the bottom. ▼ Employ the Gatling gun in wide-open areas where you can establish a fearsome field of fire. Put your back to a corner so you don't have to worry about your rear; then raise king hell until you run out of ammo. ▼ Sometimes it seems like the only way past an obstacle is to somehow walk right past the bad guys without them seeing you. If you manage to find a bottle of Acme Vanishing Cream, you may be able to do just that.

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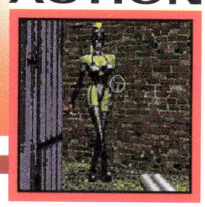

Redneck Rampage

By George T. Chronis

Time to open up a can of whup-ass!

Redneck Rampage is a foul-mouthed, politically incorrect, single-player guilty pleasure. It's also a frustrating example of technical compromises sullying an otherwise exceptional game.

As one of the first games to really start pushing Duke 3D's Build engine, RR is under some pressure to surpass its illustrious forebear. To its credit, developer Xatrix has coped admirably, producing a game that's even more offbeat in its humor and shameless in its pursuit of the cheap gag—as long as you intend to enjoy it all in single-player mode.

Even on a Pentium 200, RR doesn't have nearly the same fluidity in a Windows 95 window that Duke exhibited. In addition, for most gamers, multiplayer means access to other humans thanks to the TCP/IP and IPX clients built into Win 95. Here, Interplay actually requires players to exit to DOS. What gives? While it's conceivable that most gamers will be able to muddle through setting up DOS drivers for sound card and mouse support, not many are going to set up DOS IPX or TCP/IP drivers. We tried multiplayer under Win 95, and it's torture. So write off multiplayer rampages unless you can go modem-to-modem with a pal. Insanity!

Don't mind Billy Ray. He just doesn't like strangers.

Multiplayer problems aside, as a solo game, RR is a hell of a lot of fun. There's enough farting, pissing, burping, and guns to make any 11-year-old a happy camper. For the older crowd, some of the subtle humor is grand. In addition to the Mojo Nixon and *Toxic Avenger* posters, pick up an AK-47 and you're told you've just grabbed a "huntin' rifle." Later in the game, you must deal with the sultry Space Vixens—tall and curvy creatures dressed in revealing black leather. If a Vixen kills you, she seductively says, "You're not good enough." Terminate her existence, and you'll get everything from "But I love you" to (in a more critical tone) "It's over."

The aliens are also pretty good sports: the linebacker-sized Guard is tough, and the little brown gremlin-like guys are annoying as hell, detaching toxic pieces of themselves and throwing the acid flesh at you. (It seems they're the alien equivalent of recycled waste.) On the human side, the Old Coot and Billy Ray aren't much of a challenge, but the Sheriff, in the image of Buford T. Justice, fires fast and furious. The hardest things to kill are the nasty pitbull critters.

Weapon choices are also a hoot. The revolver and the double-barreled shotgun are pretty standard fare, but you proceed to dynamite, the AK-47, a dynamite-loaded crossbow, a circular sawblade–thrower, kegs of gunpowder, the Alien Guard's pulse weapon, and the double-barreled Vixen tit chaingun (yep, you read it right the first time!).

To top it off, the music on the CD is great, featuring songs by Nixon, The Beat Farmers, Cement Pond, and more.

On the other hand, there are a lot fewer interactive items than in Duke, especially in the early levels; don't expect to find fire extinguishers to blow up or many air vents to crawl through. But finding that one special switch or item that takes you to the next level can be a lot harder. In one example, you have to get up to a roof to get into a building that leads you to the exit. The problem is, you can't jump high enough to get on the box that allows you to jump on the roof. You must wait until a pig meanders in front of the box and then jump on the pig.

Don't be shooting up the Sheriff's town, or he'll fill you full of lead.

If a solo sendoff of the Duke experience is what you're looking for, Redneck Rampage is your game. But for those seeking multiplayer options, avoid this one, unless you have the technical savvy to accommodate its shocking shortcomings.

Just because you're in the deep South doesn't mean aliens can't come a-callin'.

REDNECK RAMPAGE

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	**B**
MULTIPLAYER:	**D**

Perfect for Duke fans who don't give a pig's rear about multiplayer matches.

DEVELOPER:	Xatrix
PUBLISHER:	Interplay 800-468-3775
WEB:	www.interplay.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 6.2 CD
REQUIRES:	P120, 16MB RAM, 30MB HD, SVGA, 4X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 32MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$49

TIPS ▼ Be sure to save dynamite so that you can blow Alien Guards to bits after you drop them. Otherwise, they regenerate. ▼ Clear a new area of mosquitoes upon entering, because they'll chase you. If you don't, the auto-aiming on your weapon will target the parasite and not the death ray–wielding Alien Vixen firing on you. ▼ The Sheriff has deadly aim, but it takes him a while to reload. Jump into his area, unload a round into him, and then jump out of view. Repeat.

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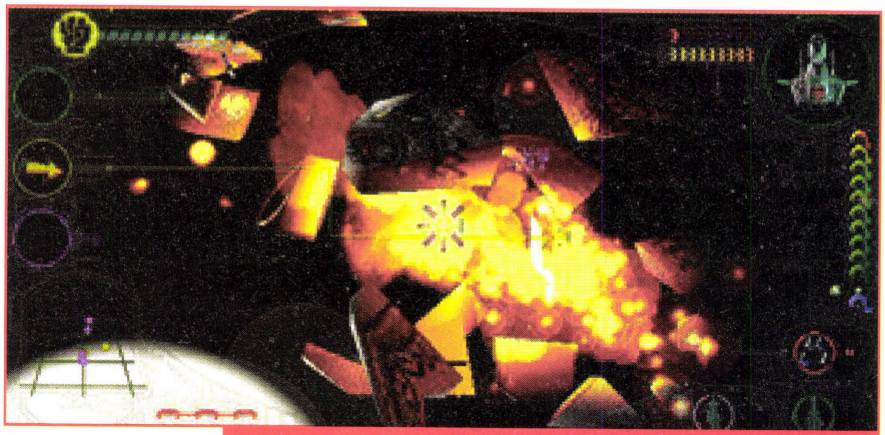
ACTION

Darklight Conflict

Wing Commander without the movies

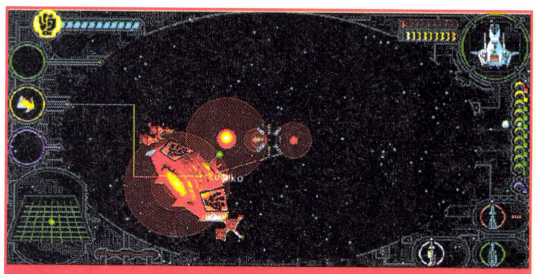
By George T. Chronis



Explosions are, as usual, one of the more pleasing aspects of the game.

At first glance, Darklight Conflict promises the game equivalent of such big-budget classic sci-fi films as *This Island Earth*. The premise is similar—terran specialists being press-ganged into an alien race's flagging war efforts. And the 3D SVGA CGI ship renderings do possess a visual texturing that harks back to those in the 1956 film. Even the sound of enemy ships passing nearby develops the same harmonic rumble. Granted, this is probably all coincidence, but the good designers at Rage have wrought an arcade-style space shooter with a lot of built-in appeal for longtime sci-fi–movie fans. Just like those old flicks, though, some faults in the details soon begin to unravel the good time.

Players are eased into their role as star-fighter pilots with the Repton Alliance via a rather lengthy training mission set that introduces ship designs, 15 weapons, and mock combat. Following training, would-be warriors are sent on a series of 50 combat missions to eliminate Ovon Imperial ships. Mission goals include everything from fighter interception, asteroid clearance, and bombing runs to retrieving valuable equipment. The missions get progressively more involved and more difficult, with increasing numbers of Ovon craft flooding each successive level. Pilots use hyperspace portals, a la *Babylon 5*, to get from one sector to another.



Multiplay offers both cooperative and cutthroat modes.

The AI running the Ovon warships is one of Darklight Conflict's greatest virtues. The Ovon will attack singularly, in formation, or in concert with other formations. Enemy ships will come at you directly, turn and run away, or try and bait you in their direction and then turn and attack. The Ovon also dogfight well—twisting and turning for advantage.

Sound like stellar combat at its best? Sadly, it's not—mainly because the game is stuck with some of the worst control-input response around. To use a slightly obscure World War II analogy, you think you should be flying a P-51, but you're stuck flying a Brewster Buffalo. True, there will be some folks who will be able to get excellent results piloting Darklight's craft, just as the Finns did with the Buffalo, but there won't be many. As long as there aren't too many opponents, targeting using the keyboard isn't all that bad. Soon enough, however, there are too many Ovons to continue this way. Mouse input actually offers the best response in tight dogfight situations, but if you're one of those people whose wrists can't take aggressive mouseplay, you're out of luck.

Joysticks are supported, but this is a mixed bag as well. Using any joystick with lighter stick resistance, such as a SideWinder Pro, the smallest tap will send your Repton fighter shooting across the screen (imagine a mouse on its loosest setting), and your targeting will always be off the mark. Hard-resistance sticks such as ThrustMaster's Fighter X allow players to size up their targets, but the high effort needed to stay on target will leave you exhausted. Luckily, as in MechWarrior 2, you eventually get far enough along to order computer wingmen to assist you in battle.

LAN multiplay is supported for up to six players. Here, the control problems are not as evident, because everyone is subject to them. There are five multiplayer modes: tag, race, mother ships, capture-the-flag, and deathmatch. If Darklight Conflict is going to find a wide following, odds are it will be via multiplayer games.

As DOS-specific games go, Darklight has a lot going for it. It looks good, it runs well on slower Pentiums, and it has an excellent list of standard weapons and game features. If only the ships weren't such a pain to fly.

The spaceships resemble classic sci-fi designs.

DARKLIGHT CONFLICT

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	C
MULTIPLAYER:	B

A classic concept marred by unwieldy controls.

DEVELOPER:	Rage
PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525
WEB:	www.ea.com/eastudios/dark
PLATFORM:	DOS 6.2, Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P60, 16MB RAM, 60MB HD, SVGA, 4X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, AWE 32–compatible sound card, joystick
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ In battle, slower speeds often help in targeting enemies. ▼ Check behind you often; Ovon like to sneak up on you. When greatly outnumbered, run away as fast as you can, then turn around and size up a target. Kill it, then repeat the procedure.

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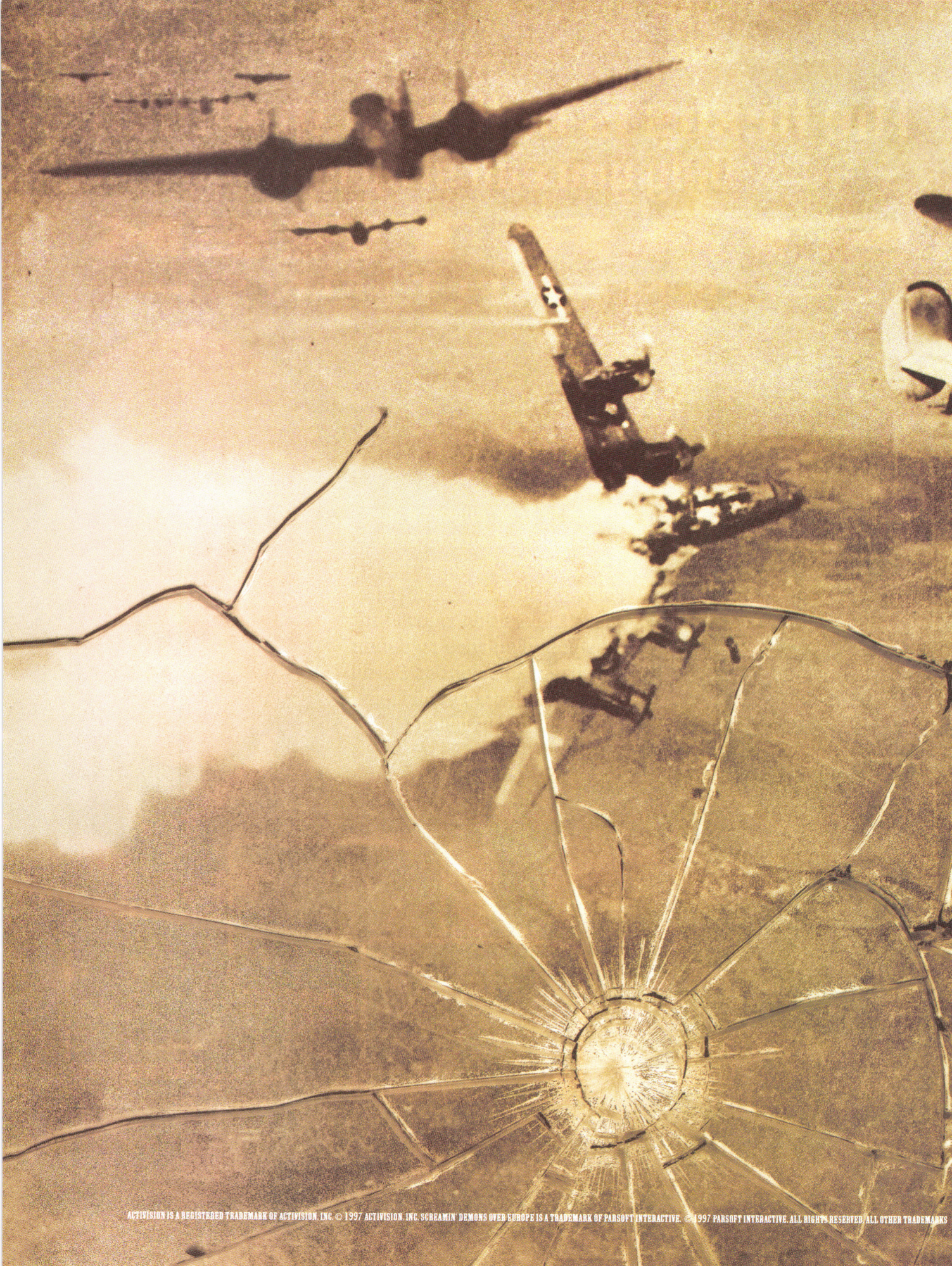

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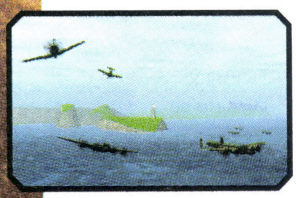
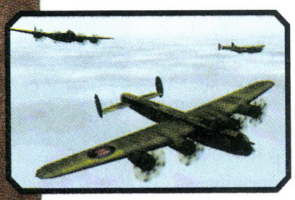
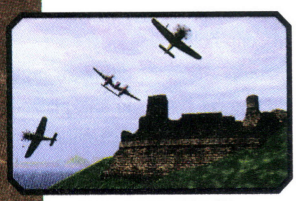


Live environments feature concussion effects, terrain deformation, and integrated road and rail systems which offer unparalleled interactions like tunnel fly-throughs.



Nine WWII aircraft duplicate plane physics for true-to-life dogfighting maneuvers such as snap rolls, tail slides, Immelmanns, barrel rolls and spin outs.



Customizable planes, an objective-based mission editor, multiplayer combat and native 3-D card support with up to 30 frames per second.

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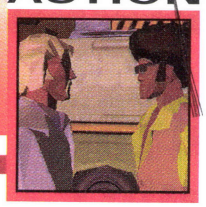


Interstate '76

By Steve Klett

That's you, Groove, on the left, with your trusted mechanic Skeeter in the middle and the ever-cool Taurus on the right.

Put the pedal to the medal and head for the '70s

It took a long time for Interstate '76 to hit the streets as Activision put the polish on the game. While I wish they could have polished it a bit more, the end result is well worth the wait: this is one groovy game that action fans should not pass up.

You fought the law and the law lost. Don't feel bad: they're crooked cops.

You're one cool cat, living in an alternate 1970s American southwest. Your name's Groove (what else?), and you're a laidback, peace-lovin' man of few words—that is, until your sister, Jade, turns up dead, shot in the back.

So you do the only thing you can—jump in Jade's souped-up muscle car and join her friend Taurus on a mission to avenge her death and, in the process, save America from hordes of auto-mercenaries bent on bringing the country to its economic knees.

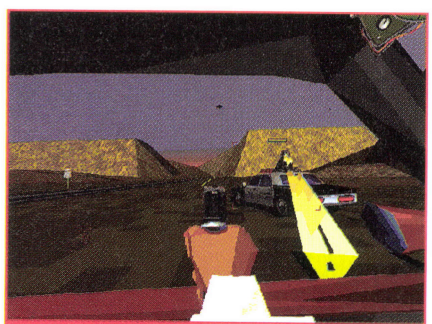
The odds are stacked on the wrong side, but you've got coolness in spades—not to mention Jade's car, which gives new meaning to the term "loaded." This baby's got all the goods: cup-holders, 8-track player, rocket launchers, mines, oil-slick dropper, radar, machine guns...you get the picture. So get in the car, listen to Taurus' instructions, and save the world. Dig?

I-76 is based on the MechWarrior 2 game engine, and if you're familiar with that title, you'll notice similarities in the mission structure. For starters, your quest unfolds over the course of 15 missions in which it's largely you against the universe. As in MW2, there are missions in which you must destroy a given target, protect a vital resource, or perform recon or escort duty. However, there's no option to play the game from the other side's viewpoint; the 15 missions are all you get.

You may be glad, because these scenarios are pretty tough. I finished the game in roughly 12 hours, with each mission taking an average of three attempts to beat. A few, however, took a dozen attempts, which skirts the line between challenging and frustrating.

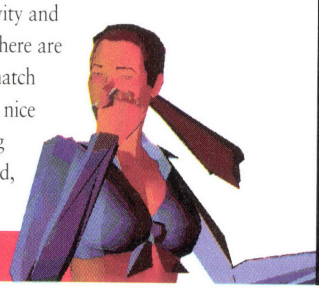
Like Mech 2: Mercenaries, you collect salvage after each mission, which you then use to beef up your car with better weapons, a new engine, tires, or brakes. A psycho mechanic named Skeeter follows you and Taurus around, collects the goodies from the wrecks you leave in your wake, and repairs your car between missions.

Cool as it is, I-76 is too fast a ride—the fun is over too quickly, with little reason to replay the missions. The game also includes many of the same annoying bugs that plagued MW2 and Mercenaries, such as sorting troubles that cause enemy vehicles to poke through canyon walls or disappear inside buildings. The game is also prone to unexplained crashes between missions. To Activision's credit, a patch for this problem is already available; you can find it on this month's PC Games.exe.



Need a quick kill? Turn to your trusty .45.

If you're into network or Internet play, I-76's strength in this area may more than make up for its single-player brevity and minor glitches. There are team and deathmatch options, and as a nice touch, the scoring system is weighted, giving you more points if you beat a bigger car (such as a school bus) with a smaller one (like a police car). The Internet play is some of the smoothest you'll find for a fast-moving game like this—jump in a game via Activision's free server, and the action rivals what you'll experience on a local network.



Umm... nice polygons.

In addition, I-76 features some of the most original, artistic cinematics I've ever seen in a game—and better still, they actually convey the game's strong story and lead up to a resolution that is a fitting reward for playing to the end. Oh, and I almost forgot the groovy original soundtrack—it's classic funk that you won't want to turn off, and considering its '70s roots, that's saying something.

INTERSTATE '76

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	A+
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

A tire-squealin' good time.

PUBLISHER:	Activision 800-477-3650
WEB:	www.activision.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 80MB HD, SVGA, 1MB VESA or PCI video, 4X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 24MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$39

TIPS ▼ Sometimes the best way to beat a mission is to try to avoid fighting at all costs. ▼ Remember to have Skeeter repair everything he can between each mission. If you don't, you'll find it next to impossible to beat the game. ▼ The .45 is one of the best weapons in the single-player game. When you've got an enemy on the ropes (i.e., his damage bar is red), the pistol is the quickest way to finish him off. ▼ In multiplayer mode, radar-guided missiles are devastating. Make sure you equip your car with a few, as well as a radar jammer for defense.

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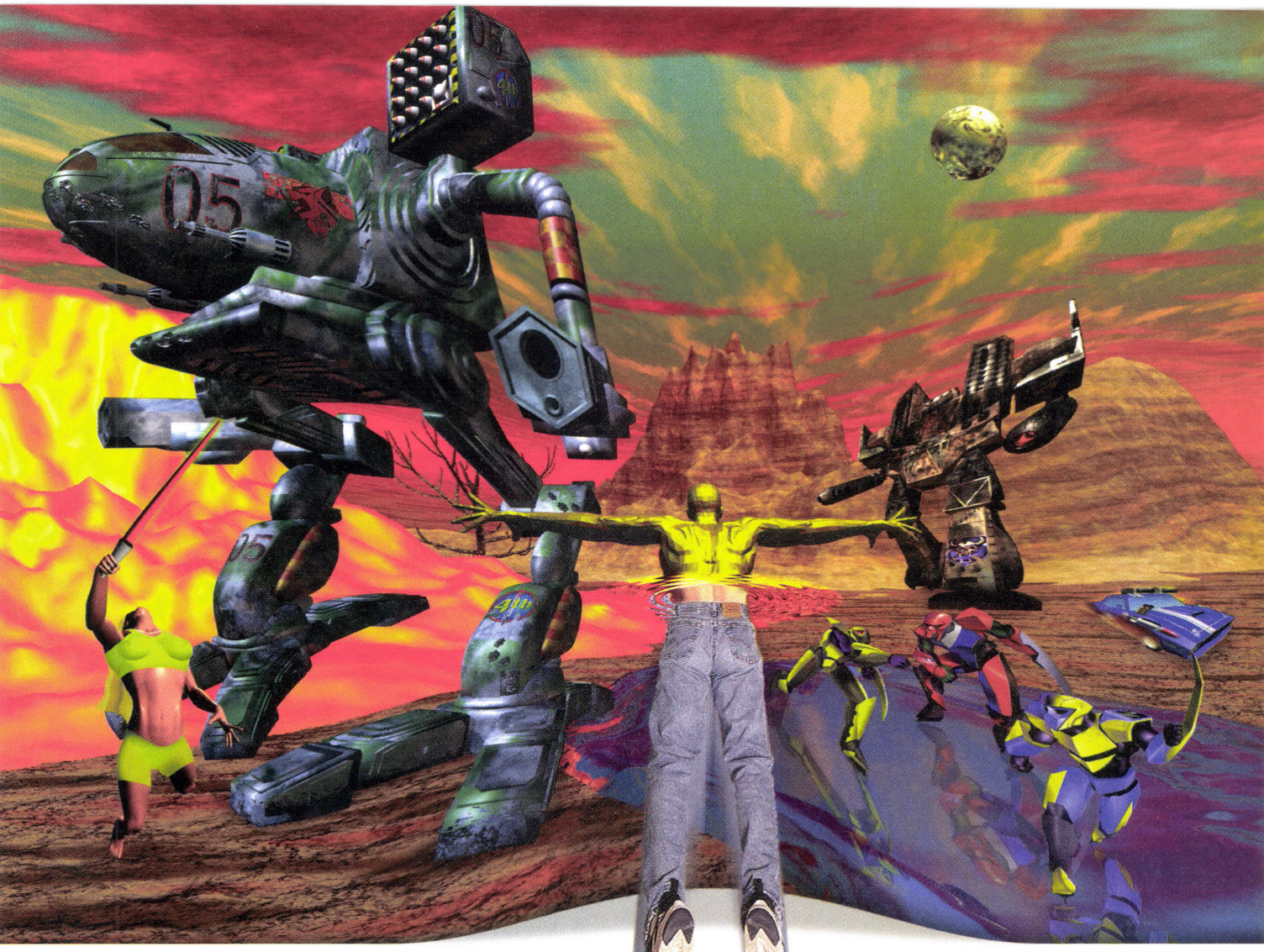

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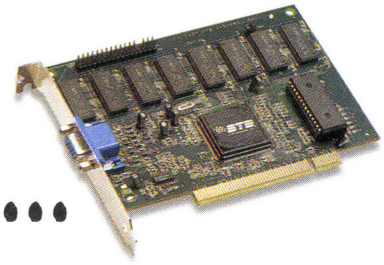

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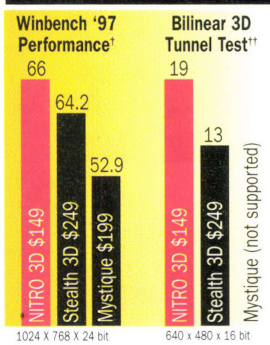

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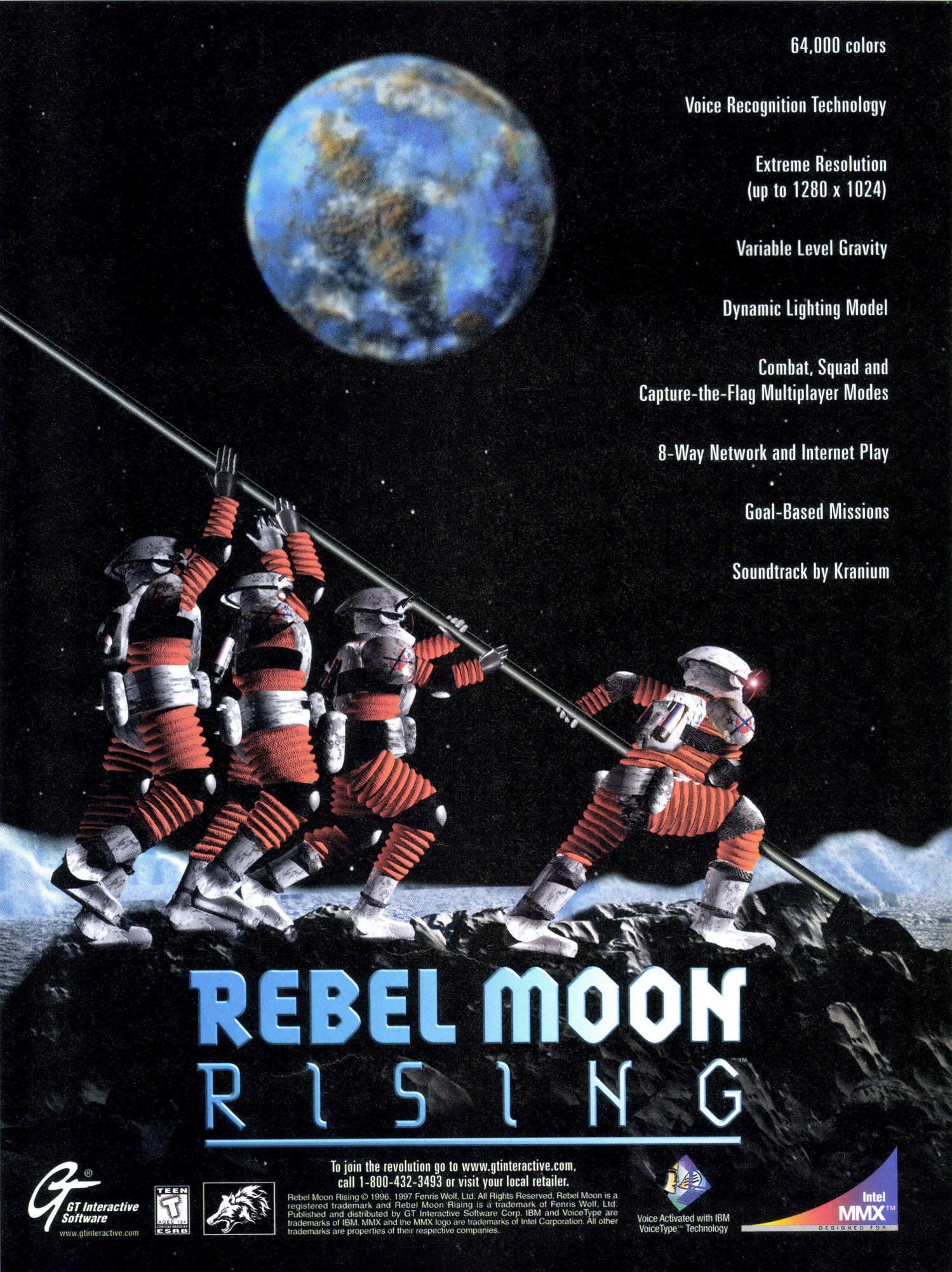
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Star Trek: Generations

By Don St. John

Not the most transporting experience

Captain's Log, Stardate 48623.4: Another lunatic is running around the outer rim of the galaxy frying stars, and we've got to stop him.

Surely you recognize the basic plot of 1994's *Star Trek: Generations* movie. This time, except for occasional cinematics lifted from the film, it's your show: You're the various officers of the *Enterprise*, and you have to stop the obsessed El Aurian, Soran, from imploding world after world. Simple enough, eh?

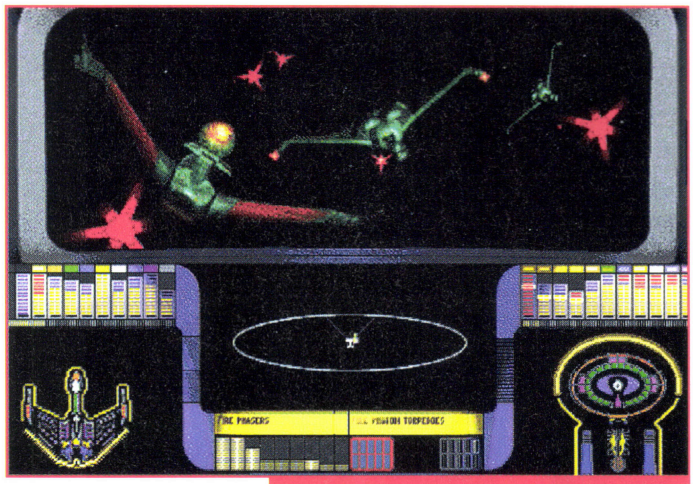
Like the movie, though, this largely first-person action experience runs the gamut from pleasant to maddening. MicroProse has done a lot with the basic story, and concocted gameplay that is challenging as hell. The game features 12 intricate missions and 20 space battles that typically throw you right into a murky situation with Romulans and other baddies blasting at you from the get-go. MicroProse certainly got one thing right: Your enemies rarely miss.

Before missions, you spend some prep time in the *Enterprise*'s Stellar Cartography lab with Picard and Data, getting your orders and finding the elusive Soran. He's using the unstable compound trilithium to implode stars, which changes gravitational fields, which in turn pushes around an odd energy ribbon called the Nexus. Life is nirvana within the Nexus, and Soran wants in bad enough to lay waste to the galaxy.

You stop him by visiting different planets as various officers; all the original *Next Generation* cast members are joined by Malcolm McDowell (Soran) and William Shatner (duh!) to voice their roles, lending a good air of authenticity. However, the feel of the missions is atypical in that you're alone—Troi reprising her undercover Romulan disguise, Worf on a Klingon prison planet, Riker running around a largely deserted space station. The lack of a true Away Team will be jarring to Trekkers. And too often, the actors (Marina Sirtis' Troi excepted) are obviously reading their scripts instead of fully acting them; there's a bored feel to many of their lines.

Finding your way around is extremely difficult, too, with no clues other than a sparse description at the beginning of a mission. While the exploration factor is exciting, you don't have time for leisurely decisions because you usually come under fire quickly...which is kind of exciting, too. The same thing goes for space-combat missions, where you're in disoriented battle against Romulan warbirds or Klingon birds of prey the second you enter a melee.

It might be easier to spot what to do if the graphics were up to snuff—and indeed they are on MMX machines, which create a crisp playing environment (earning a B graphics grade). On non-MMX computers, everything is much more muddy. On top of that, the game's been let out of the door with a few curious, even downright shoddy elements—enemies walking around aimlessly in circles, Picard issuing intercom orders to Data (who's sitting right next to him), reused dialogue. You'll even have to beware of enemies you thought you vaporized: Revisit an area, and occasionally you'll find them there again. Worst of all, you can't save in the middle of a mission; suffer an emergency beam-out, and you'll have to start from the beginning to beat the mission.



Mr. Worf, arm photon torpedoes.

It's a shame, because the basics of Generations are fun and worthwhile. The mission sequences vary endlessly depending on how you've done. The actual play is quite challenging, with smartly designed rewards or problems based on how well you're meeting mission objectives. Losing a mission doesn't lose you the whole game, either. You may as well give Generations a whirl; just don't expect it to play at Warp Factor One.

The Chodak and Soran. Yeah, you'd better fire.

That phaser won't do you any good underwater.

STAR TREK: GENERATIONS

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	C-
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	C+

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Smart, authentic play ideas, tripped up by less-than-stellar graphics and occasionally clumsy design.

PUBLISHER:	MicroProse 800-729-4050
WEB:	www.microprose.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 80MB HD, 4X CD-ROM drive, 16-bit color
RECOMMENDED:	P166 MMX, 32MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ Click on stunned enemies, and they hop right up. If you want to keep them down and get their weapon or tricorder, re-stun them a bunch of times or just kill them. ▼ Don't vaporize the first Romulan: you need his tricorder to set yours for a trilithium scan. ▼ Worf needs to fall down a sand hole outside of the Klingon prison base. ▼ Most levels have damaged equipment of some sort; avoid it all, or you'll take huge health hits. ▼ Troi's path should be fine until you get inside, where you have to find the gray elevator door. Go anywhere else, and the Romulans catch on to you.

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HeliCOPS

By Jason D'Aprile

Lock on and let loose in intense aerial combat.

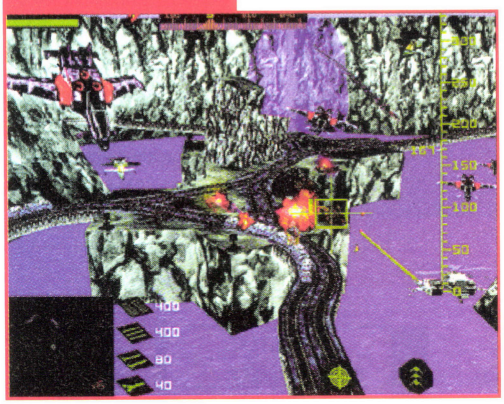
This latest offering from 7th Level is the sort of game that would look right at home on a console system, or even in the arcade. No small feat, actually. A mission-based action sim, HeliCOPS isn't deep or complex, but it sure is fun.

Select from a group of elite Neo-Tokyo helicopter cops in the year 2015, as you struggle to save this post-apocalyptic city from the evil grip of syndicate crime boss Maxwell Criger and his vile lackeys. HeliCOPS has strong animé influences—

The PC shows its console-style wings

indeed, the genre figures heavily in the game's unique design and look, and at times, it seems as if the designers tried to add a semblance of story development outside your involvement in the completion of the mission objectives. In the end, though, there's not much of a plot. There are barely even any cinematic sequences in the game to help keep the after-level inertia going.

Stop that train! Comb those caverns for the bad guys.



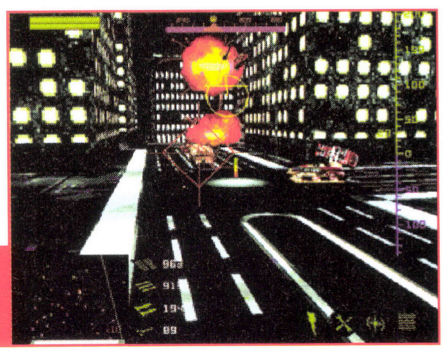
You start off with a choice of five helicopters to fly, and while it doesn't really matter which pilot you use, there are definite differences in the vehicles' handling. The game itself is surprisingly fun and involving, due in large part to the fact that much of it is spent fighting within the city. Weaving in and around city streets, between skyscrapers, hugging the asphalt or the tops of towering buildings, is an absolute hoot. In some levels, you actually fly your chopper into and out of buildings, and there are cavernous indoor levels as well.

The graphics are quite good, and they run well even on mid-range Pentiums; plus, the game will optimize for MMX to improve frame rates even more. HeliCOPS uses a fogging technique to keep the large urban levels from causing slowdown, and there are some impressive visual effects. The 23 missions include chasing down and destroying vehicles before they reach a safe zone, rescuing hostages, searching for bombs and artifacts, and various other tasks that inevitably require blowing a huge number of things to kingdom come. In all, there's enough playtime for any arcade jockey.

The controls are responsive and the game allows auto-targeting, so you can concentrate on flying while shooting, as opposed to pinpoint aiming. Oddly enough, however, there aren't many options in the way of controller customization. As with most arcade-style shooters, there are plenty of powerups to augment your ship (usually temporarily), and a fair number of villains to shoot down. The sound effects are solid, although, unlike 7th Level's G-NOME, HeliCOPS' musical score is rather weak.

Aside from the entertaining single-player mode, HeliCOPS' deathmatch mode is another ace in its favor. While the game offers the usual eight-player IPX and two-player modem connections, the TCP/IP Internet support is incredible. Like G-NOME, HeliCOPS ran nearly perfect over the course of several test games with different players and numbers of players with virtually no lag. The only error we encountered was an occasional loss of synchronization after playing for several minutes. Deathmatches made the city levels even more appealing, although there's no cooperative team mode, which would have been a useful addition.

Break it all down, and you've got a game that's fun, fast-paced, hard, and full of explosions. The great Internet play gives it another boost, and on the whole, I'd definitely recommend it for mindless-action fans. It's just a shame more effort wasn't put into the story or characters; that would have given the one-player game much better long-term play value.



Get in some Neo-Tokyo nightlife as you nail those tanks.

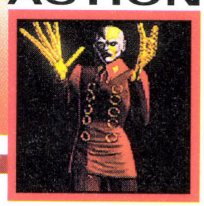
HELICOPS

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	A

Fun, arcade-style flying-and-shooting action. And it works great over the Net.

DEVELOPER:	Paragon Visual Systems
PUBLISHER:	7th Level 800-556-0488
WEB:	www.7thlevel.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P100, 8MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ The Triton is a good middle-ground copter. The Brutus is cumbersome and very undesirable in deathmatching. The Ninja is fast but can't take any damage. The Spectre and Ronin are both solid vehicles. ▼ In the second Oblix mission, remember that some of the tanks are being brought over on boats. ▼ Your radar display will show you everything in its range, even powerups, so make good use of it. ▼ In the hostage-rescue mission, the hospital is the tall pale building due east of the hostages. ▼ Shoot Giger apart a piece at a time, saving his head for last. Once you knock out his guns and legs, he's helpless.



Meat Puppet

By Daniel Morris

Meat Puppet is a game I eagerly anticipated. Look what it has going for it: a foul-mouthed homicidal heroine, an isometric view of a bleak industrial wasteland terrorized by megacorporations, a BFG called the Ready-Kill...how can you go wrong?

Well...

Meat Puppet is clearly the product of story-tellers—film buffs with a vision of a dystopian future populated by corporate killers and amnesiac assassins. While there isn't anything terribly original about this concept, the designers spent a lot of energy devising a detailed game world. Detail in general is where this game really scores—from the dossiers of the quirky corporate bosses who are contracted for assassination to the meticulously designed buildings and street scenes.

But the game's premise is cribbed directly from *Aeon Flux*—a laconic expendable hardbody is conscripted by a nebulous overseer to conduct assassinations of business rivals. The game's milieu also owes a lot to *Blade Runner*, whole chunks of which can be spotted woven into Meat Puppet. All in all, the game plays like an enthusiastic listing of Great Sci-Fi Conventions of the Movies.

Lotos Abstraction is your name, and needless to say, you don't have a past. You do have an attitude, a fact we're constantly reminded of thanks to voice-overs full of stylistically bored profanity amid the carnage. Along for the ride is a cyberassistant named Domain, who steers you around and offers tips on defeating drone soldiers, automated guns, knife-wielding midgets, and other assorted post-millennial madness.

The problem is that the game doesn't do anything with this rich environment. The levels are blazed through from the Crusader: No Remorse/Regret isometric view; unfortunately, Meat Puppet doesn't come close to surpassing those quintessential action games. Meat Puppet's puzzles are less challenging and less interesting, and its enemies are much, much dumber.

Surrounded by malignant street killers, under the watchful eye of a dystopian future's requisite scary corporate poster.

Hey buddy, this is the third time I've shot your partner. When are you going to turn around?

Poor AI is the major shortfall. It's consistently subpar; at times, it's downright awful. I'd been shooting that guy in the screenshot (right) for about five full seconds, and the other sentry hadn't even noticed what was going on! Such instances abound. At many points, the enemies in an area can be thwarted by simply walking past them. They offer no resistance unless attacked, despite their direct orders to blast on sight.

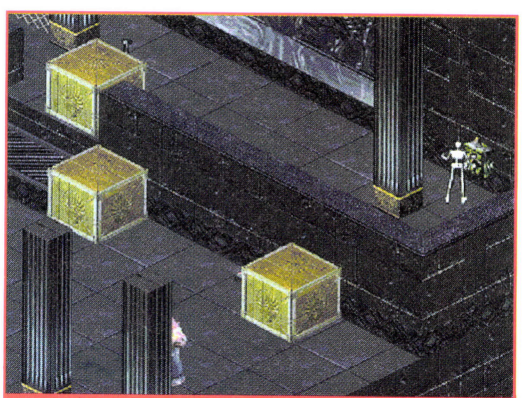
Getting started is a chore. There's nothing intuitive about the gameplay, and you'll pretty much need to read the entire manual to know what you're doing. Lotos' range of movement, limited to running, rolling, and back-flipping, is nothing like the range available in Crusader, and maneuvering around gets to be a pain.

The sound is also disappointing (although the music is cool). On the first level alone, you will hear an annoying sentry voice say "Subdue the intruder" about 90 times. Minor variations include "She must be contained," spoken about 70 times. One wishes the designers had spent a little less time detailing all this impressive art and a little more time on everything else.

Oh, about the art—it's fantastic. Every screen is a treat for the eyes, regardless of what's happening in it. The meticulous detail is truly something to behold, at least until your boredom with the game sours your eagerness to see the visuals waiting around the next corner.

Meat Puppet gets kudos for its attention to a rich game environment and gorgeous environs. But after the immersive experience of the Crusader games, Meat Puppet's uninvolving gameplay and infantile AI doom it to deletion from my hard drive. I would love to see its designers tackle it again and shape serious AI and more intriguing puzzles.

Here's hoping for a brighter future.



Be careful when hotwiring control panels, or you could be in for quite a shock.

MEAT PUPPET

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	C-
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	C
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Beautiful worlds, ugly AI.

DEVELOPER:	Kronos Digital Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Playmates Interactive Entertainment 714-428-2112
WEB:	www.playmatestoys.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 84MB HD, 4X CD-ROM drive, 16-bit graphics card
RECOMMENDED:	P120 or better
STREET PRICE:	$50

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[Centauri Galaxy]

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Re Rebellion .881	**It** Intellect .999	**Gm** Global Maps .703	**Mp** Multiplayer .1005	**Sv** Survival .703	**Tc** Tactics .0202	**Ad** Adrenalin .299
Cm Combat .03	**Sa** Sabotage .011	**Ct** Construction 0.090	**Ev** Evacuation .302	**An** Anxiety .0406	**Cd** Command .105	**SE** Seismic Eve .505
M Morale .171	**Fi** Fire .139	**Me** Meteor .52	**Vc** Volcano .905	**Wr** Wreckage .408	**Cnf** Confrontation .002	**Ms** Missions .0849

Element of Surprise

Element of Danger

Element of Destruction

Element of Disaster

Dynamix

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M lagma 312	Me Microbe .119	Ps Psychosis .9054	F^us Fusion .5005	D Danger .0054	Cg Courage .0202	Va^3 Vacuum of space .298
Hg unger 03	Mi Mining .081	Di Discovery .081	Rs Research .032	Dn Desperation .217	Bc Balance .1003	Dn Day and Night .055
			Cy Conspiracy .111	St Strategy .1005	T^cn Technology .071	Ak Attack .0334

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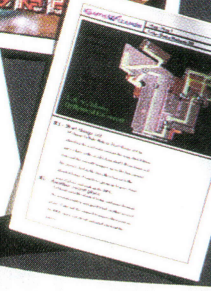

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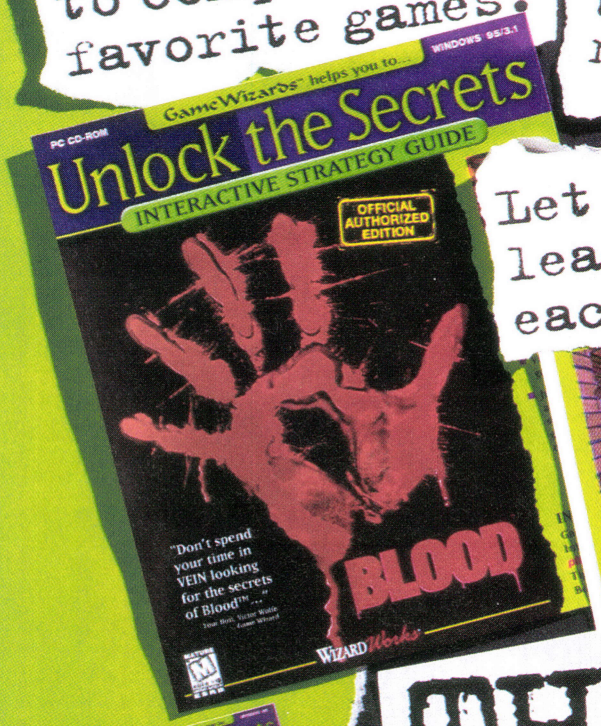

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Blood

When attacking zombies with the pitchfork, move forward, stab, then move back before they swing the ax. Repeat.

Take the Duke Nukem 3D Build engine, add a slight upgrade and a generous helping of blood, gore, and general bad taste, and lo! It's a whole new first-person shooter.

As a paltry plaything of the evil god Tchernabog, it's something of a shock to wake up one morning to find yourself marginally alive, but in the body of a surprisingly well-preserved corpse. The thing is, meddling with the affairs of evil cults and landing yourself in an affair with a member of said cult will put you in these tricky situations. It's obvious what must be done: Rescue the girlfriend and challenge Tchernabog to free yourself from his bondage.

Gratuitous gore galore

This task encompasses four episodes of six to eight levels each (with secrets thrown in) of stabbing, shooting, burning, and decapitating a range of bizarre and occasionally downright stupid enemies. There's a broad range of weapons with which you can destroy enemies, including a napalm gun, Tommy gun, spray can, and voodoo doll. Head soccer is also a possibility, as decapitated zombies lose various appendages when killed. From the piddling rats who nibble at ankles to the crazily accurate (and therefore overly dangerous) cult members, Blood presents a stern test of any action gamer's twitch abilities.

Sadly, nifty features such as moving boats in occasionally inventive level designs are hampered by shoddy AI. In all but the highest graphic settings, Blood also looks severely dated in its 2D glory. Supported by hearty screams of pain and evil cackling, the sound effects are passable.

Eight-player network multiplayer options and support over the Internet are welcome, but messages such as "so-and-so was castrated/lobotomized/sodomized" after killing an opponent are just too crass. While playing this game for the review, the distinctive sounds of a network Quake deathmatch floated to my ears. Without thinking, Blood was off and Quake was on. Which says a lot about Blood's appeal...

—Rob Smith

BLOOD

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	C
MULTIPLAYER:	C

C OVERALL

For those who want more (but will accept less) of the Duke-like experience.

DEVELOPER:	Monolith Productions
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive 800-621-4847
WEB:	www.blood.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 6.2/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, 65MB HD, VGA, 4X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, SVGA
STREET PRICE:	$35

Reloaded

Another subpar conversion

The original Loaded was a brutally violent, fun, and visually impressive overhead PlayStation shooter with a decidedly gritty atmosphere. It was an excellent game, and would have been a better choice for PC conversion than its subpar sequel, Reloaded. This is a strange little game that doesn't begin to display anything worth mention until the fourth level.

You take control of one homicidal maniac (from a choice of six) and waste everything across 12 overhead 3D killing grounds. Only the levels that remain faithful to the look and feel of the first game provide any real enjoyment. The first few levels take place on a bright desert world featuring graphics that are worse than awful. The textures and characters are so blocky that they look like escapees from an Atari 2600 game.

Then you get plunked down into a setting that looks suspiciously like a close-up view of a Syndicate Wars level. It's dark and grungey, and the lighting effects are superb. The characters still look awful, but the dark helps hide the low graphical quality, and touches like streetlights and gunfire flashes help significantly.

The sound and music are mediocre, the only multiplayer support is a single screen, two-player mode (same as the original PlayStation version), and you can save only at the end of a level. On top of that, the frame rate bordered on choppy in 640-by-480 mode on a P200 MMX.

Play is still mindless action, but the control-pad support is terribly lacking (only two buttons when it needs four). If Gremlin releases a 3D-acceleration patch for the game, it would vastly improve the look and playability by allowing better frame rates in hi-res. As it stands, if you can muddle through the first few dismal levels (as tough as it may seem), there is some modicum of entertainment value. But with so many other truly great games around, it's not worth the effort. *—Jason D'Aprile*

Not much mental expenditure needed here—just blow away all the blocky pixels that move.

RELOADED

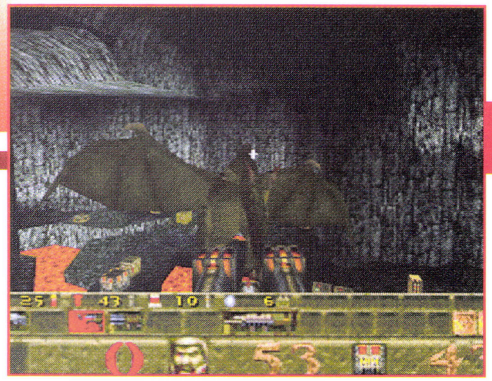
GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	D+
SOUND CHECK:	C-
MULTIPLAYER:	D-

D+ OVERALL

Mindless violence backed by bad graphics.

DEVELOPER:	Gremlin Interactive
PUBLISHER:	Interplay 800-969-4263
WEB:	www.interplay.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 5.0 CD
REQUIRES:	P60, 16MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$30

Dissolution of Eternity



The final conflict is far more satisfying than the Shub-Niggurath disappointment.

I guess it's true what they say about lightning never striking twice. After the splendid Scourge of Armagon, Quake Mission Pack No. 2: Dissolution of Eternity comes off as a rather workman-like add-on to id's world-beating 3D shooter.

Assembled by Rogue Entertainment—the outfit behind Velocity's interesting Doom spinoff, Strife—this attachment includes 17 levels; a raft of new creatures (mostly variations on existing types), ammo (ditto), and deadly effects; and multiplayer spins on Capture the Flag and Tag. Spinning saw traps, multiple rockets and lava nails, and ethereal knights and eels do offer some degree of variety, however derivative they may be.

You just can't get enough

What went wrong? Well, oddly enough, Dissolution lacks a sense of mission. The single-player levels, arranged in two episodes, are competently designed, but push neither the limits of the imagination nor the game system. Many of the early ones are obvious and joyless in structure, although the later Egyptian levels have a distinct style all their own. Compared to Scourge, which had a vibrant, real-world hook, No. 2 doesn't display much in the way of creative spark.

I also ran into a few technical issues, including repeated RAM alerts on certain levels (using a machine with 64MB of RAM), enemy bodies and body parts suspended in air, disconnected heads rotating in place, and a sometimes-lethargic update on a Pentium 200 MMX system.

To its credit, QMP2's difficulty level is more sensibly pitched than the parent game's: "Hard" here is roughly the equivalent of "Nightmare" in regular Quake, and it's a good challenge for vets. The levels in the second episode display considerably more ingenuity and make better use of 3D than those in the first: The earthquake effect, for one, was persuasive enough that it made me feel dizzy even while sitting down. And if you make it to the end, you're in for a real shock.

But I'm afraid that, overall, QMP2 falls short of my expectations—and its predecessor's creativity.

—Peter Olafson

QUAKE MISSION PACK NO. 2

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	B

New creatures and levels, but little real creative ingenuity.

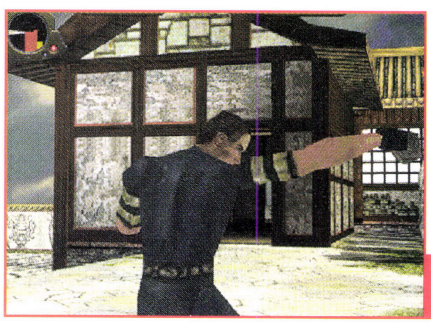
DEVELOPER:	Rogue Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Activision 800-477-3650
WEB:	www.activision.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 5.0/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75,16MB RAM, 40MB HD, 2X CD-ROM drive, registered version of Quake
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$30

Perfect Weapon

Duke it out, alien-style

Here's one of those rare and pleasant surprises where a little game you'd generally just scoff at turns out to be not just a solid title in its own right, but vastly superior to its nearest competitor. Perfect Weapon is similar to the much-hyped (and, in my opinion, awful) Time Commando, with its beautiful pre-rendered 3D scenery, excellent character animation, solid sound, and focus on hand-to-hand combat. The key difference is that this game is actually playable and interactive.

Players assume the role of alien-abducted Captain Blake Hunter, Earth Command Defense Force's top agent and world champion martial artist, as he winds his way through five levels of harsh alien landscape. While the game is mostly beat-'em-up action, it smoothly incorporates exploration and adventure as well. The "puzzle" elements—a minor part of the game—include things like finding keys and items necessary for Blake's survival, and discovering hidden areas with powerups.



Even aliens should know better than to mess with a guy named Blake Hunter.

One of the best things here is the martial-arts action: not only is it realistic and playable, but you almost always end up fighting four opponents simultaneously. Perfect Weapon is playable with the keyboard, but if you own a SideWinder gamepad, you're in luck—the support is exceptional, making fine use of all the buttons.

Is this truly a Perfect Weapon? Not really. In combat, it's often difficult to keep Blake aligned with his current opponent, which is pretty annoying. Also, because the game updates the screen instead of scrolling, and there's no way to adjust the viewing angle, there are times when you lose sight of your character behind obstacles, or, even worse, because the game refuses to update the screen properly.

Still, for fans of martial-arts games, this is a welcome title, and a fine alternative to standard 2D slugfests and lame PC-only 3D tournament fighters. The action is fast-paced, and there's a decent story and good control to back it up.

—Jason D'Aprile

PERFECT WEAPON

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Solid control, great graphics, satisfying exploration.

DEVELOPER:	Gray Matter
PUBLISHER:	American Softworks Corporation
WEB:	www.ascgames.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P120, 8MB RAM, 1MB HD, 4X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 16MB RAM, SideWinder gamepad
STREET PRICE:	$38

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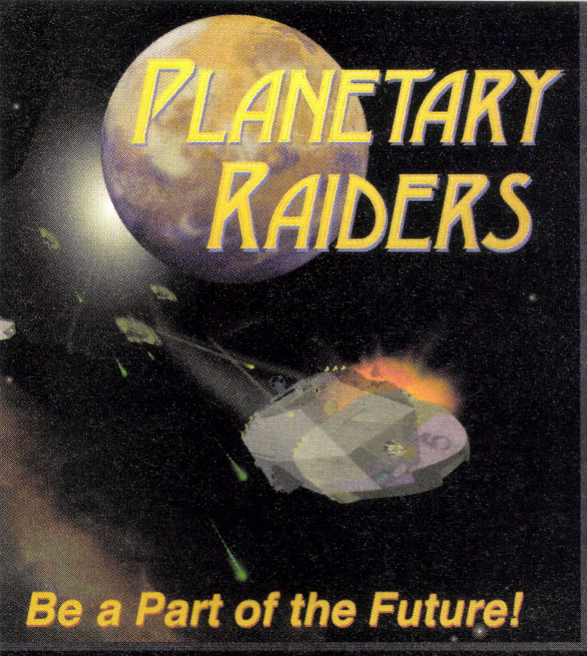
PLANETARY RAIDERS



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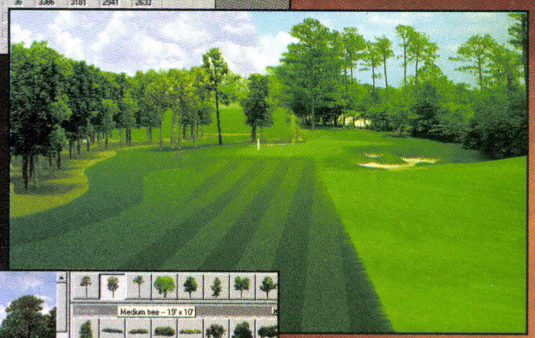

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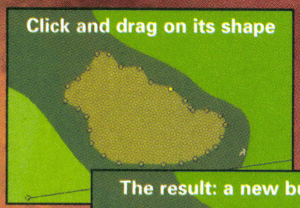
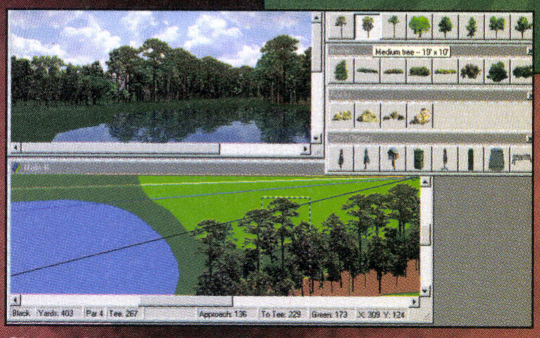


Click and drag on its shape

The result: a new bunker



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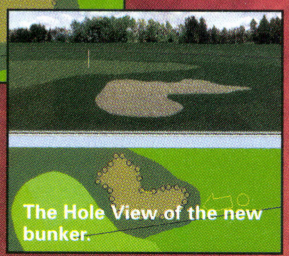
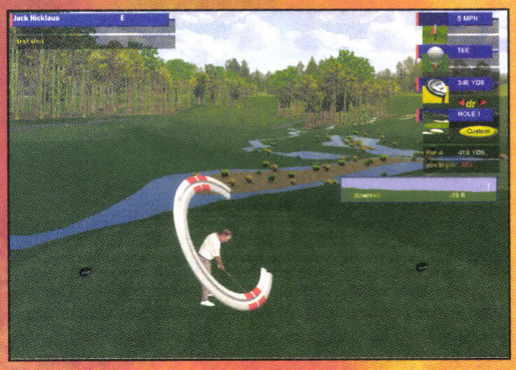
This image is of the 3rd Green at Country Club of the South. The left half of the image is from the Course Designer; the right half of the image is an actual photo.



The Hole View of the new bunker.

From Tee to Green

The Tee Shot



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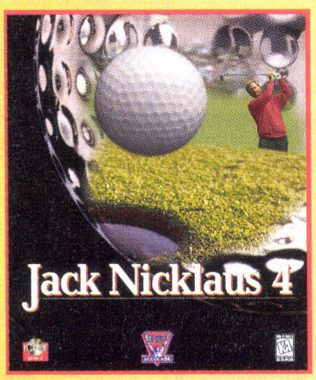

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Eve

By Don St. John

Sound and vision, beautifully done

After all, before Gabriel and friends became Genesis, the band was called the Garden Wall.

When is a game more than just a game? When it comes from the fertile mind of Peter Gabriel. The ever-inventive rock superstar has taken an acute interest in multimedia throughout the decade, and his new title, Eve, blends gameplay, music, and multimedia ruminations on the nature of interpersonal communication into a superb combination.

Eve is the enigmatic, addictive, graphically beautiful adventure game that all other adventure games wish they could be. It's not for everyone; those whose concept of gameplay is limited to blasting away with an RPG need not bother. But gamers looking for something deeper—and, of course, Gabriel fans—will find Eve impossible to stop messing with, once they get the hang of it.

That, unfortunately, takes some doing; if Eve has a flaw, it's that it'll drive many players to distraction at the beginning. When you start, you encounter a nude man and woman gyrating together briefly, then separating. Okay, the allusion to the Adam-and-Eve tale is obvious enough. Then Gabriel shows up with a suitcase and heads outside; when you follow him out, you find yourself in a landscape of nothing but mud. Now what the hell are you supposed to do?

Gradually, things come clear—especially if you read the instruction booklet first. See, when Adam and Eve split, Paradise turned to mud, and you need to find the necessary objects to restore its full beauty. Doing that isn't very instinctive: We strongly recommend reading the basic hints in the instruction booklet. That'll help you figure out the game's little quirks, like holding down the mouse button until an uncovered musical sample is finished playing (otherwise, it doesn't get added to your inventory).

Once you've figured it out? Oh, what an audiovisual treat awaits. As you find the inventory, new areas of the landscape open, and the decayed earth gives way to vibrant, lush greenery. Eventually, you've restored Paradise entirely, in the form of a beautiful English garden. All this is rendered in a superb 360-degree perspective, backed by the sort of detailed ambient soundtrack you might expect from a musician of Gabriel's caliber.

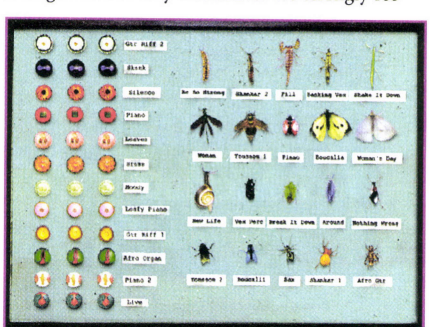
Pop open Gabriel's suitcases, and you'll get some tips on the nature of relationships—and some goodies.

Mud, as far as the eye can seeeeeeeeee...

That's not where the amazing sounds end, either. Each of Eve's four episodes features a Gabriel song ("Come Talk To Me," "Shaking The Tree," "In Your Eyes," and "Passion") that's built from the sounds you collected. As you add sounds to your inventory, they're available for you to build your own mixes of the songs, on the fly. You can do this either at a basic mixing area, or in an amazing graphical animation with clickable spots that trigger the sounds. That's a better payoff than most games give you for solving puzzles, eh?

And there are still more extras. Gabriel collaborated with four female artists on the look of each episode, and various buildings in the landscapes hold interactive installations of the artists' work, as well as video samples of Gabriel and other luminaries discussing relationships in sound bites. Don't skip these—some of them have objects you'll need to open up the environment and its pathways.

Fortunately, Eve never loses sight of the play factor, and solving this game is as involving and satisfying as any adventure we've seen in a long time. Moreover, it's a game that doesn't force any pace on you. Want to solve the puzzles and restore Paradise ASAP? Go as fast as you like. If not, you can linger with the extras, meandering your way through. The sense of expansiveness and subtle playfulness in Eve befits an artist who employed dancing flowers and other theatrics in his Genesis days and concocted the oddball video brilliance of "Sledgehammer." Maybe Gabriel should bag music and do games full-time...nah.



Get enough of these objects and you can remix "Shaking The Tree."

EVE

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	C-
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	A+
OVERALL	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

An endlessly addictive gaming and musical treat.

DEVELOPER:	Starwave/RealWorld
PUBLISHER:	Inscape 310-312-5705
WEB:	www.inscape.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95/Mac CD
REQUIRES:	486/66, 8MB RAM, 10MB HD, VESA local bus or PCI video, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ In the beginning, it's a good idea to play with the Web site hints open on your screen; go to http://realworld.on.net/eve/index.html. ▼ The dancing ball of light is easy to grab, but harder to get rid of; usually Gabriel needs it dropped on him. ▼ It takes three tries to smash a dwarf. ▼ Save your song mixes: RealWorld plans an Internet site where you'll be able to post them and download other players' versions.

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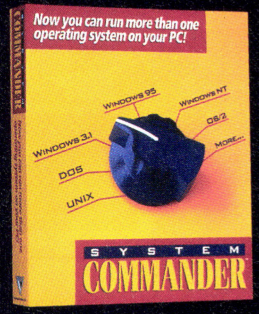

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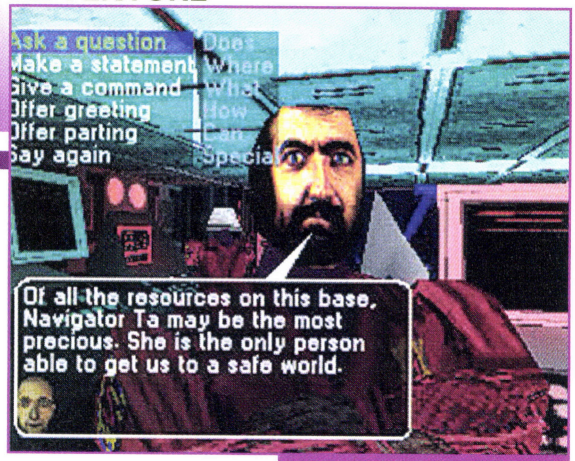
Sentient

Zork in space



Every bloke has a story, and you must listen to each one.

If you can imagine the original Zork updated with polygonal visuals and a British accent, then you have a good idea of what Psygnosis' new adventure game, Sentient, is all about. As a relief medic sent to a far-off space station in danger of being consumed by a nearby star, it's your job to investigate the true cause of increased radiation sickness among the crew. Along the way, this turns into a conspiracy directed at undermining the station's energy-mining mission. Heady stuff.

Gameplay is mostly walking around the station and talking to people who wander by. Keeping track of who you speak to isn't easy, because whoever named these characters spent too much time reading *Dune*—names like Azzira, Garrilac and Malicek (and those are only the last names). At least they have actual human faces bolted onto their polygon bodies so you can tell them apart. Players have a wealth of conversation options to choose from, and the game encourages you to revisit people to gain new information. Sentient also gives you the option of being aggressive or passive in your interactions. Strangely, considering the high-quality sound effects, what characters say is read comic-book style, rather than spoken.

Sentient is a completely real-time adventure, and while there are some events outside the control of characters that can influence your progress, what drives the game is a near-total reliance on character interaction. Sometimes people are happy to say hello and chat; others will stun you on sight. Since every interaction is different, how you adapt, resolve, and learn from them is how you will progress. Unfortunately, getting through this game takes an incredible amount of time. Thankfully, Psygnosis did not rely on puzzles to slow down an already laborious process.

If hours of roaming around investigating a mystery and chatting it up with futuristic British locals far out on the galactic rim sounds interesting, then Sentient is for you.

—George T. Chronis

SENTIENT

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	C+

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

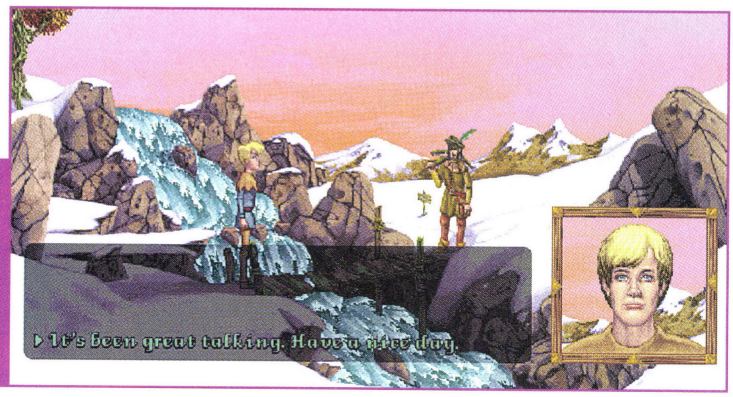
Noble intentions don't overcome limited target audience.

PUBLISHER:	Psygnosis 800-438-7794
WEB:	www.psygnosis.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133
STREET PRICE:	$45

Fable

Fable is Sir-Tech's mark in the long-standing tradition of third-person-perspective adventure games. It's a graphically impressive tale of good and evil, where you must struggle to restore the failing balance of your world.

As young Quickthorpe, your quest involves searching a mythical land for four magical gems, each guarded by a being whose apparent sins against the land and the ancient inhabitants led to his being transformed into a terrible monster forced to keep watch over the crystal.



Meet the gruff woodsman, one of many strange characters to be found throughout the various realms.

Simple adventure, strong story

Fable's plot and graphics are certainly promising, and make for an involving fantasy setting, but in other areas, the game design doesn't measure up. For one thing, much of the dialogue is annoyingly bad, replete with awful jokes and occasional modern-day references that are painfully out of place. The major problem is that the gameplay is dated: the puzzles are completely item-based, though some are rather obscure, and the dialogue is treated in a primtive fashion (you essentially just go through the whole list of possible queries whenever you meet someone). To top it off, the main character's generally whining demeanor quickly becomes grating.

The graphics, animation, and certain visuals are quite striking, making for some interesting sights; the music and sound effects are good as well. Indeed, Fable gets high marks for its presentation, and the game itself would have looked much better had it been released a couple of years ago. In today's market, however, the simplicity could appeal to younger and more casual gamers, but hardcore adventure gamers will have seen most of this before.

—Jason D'Aprile

FABLE

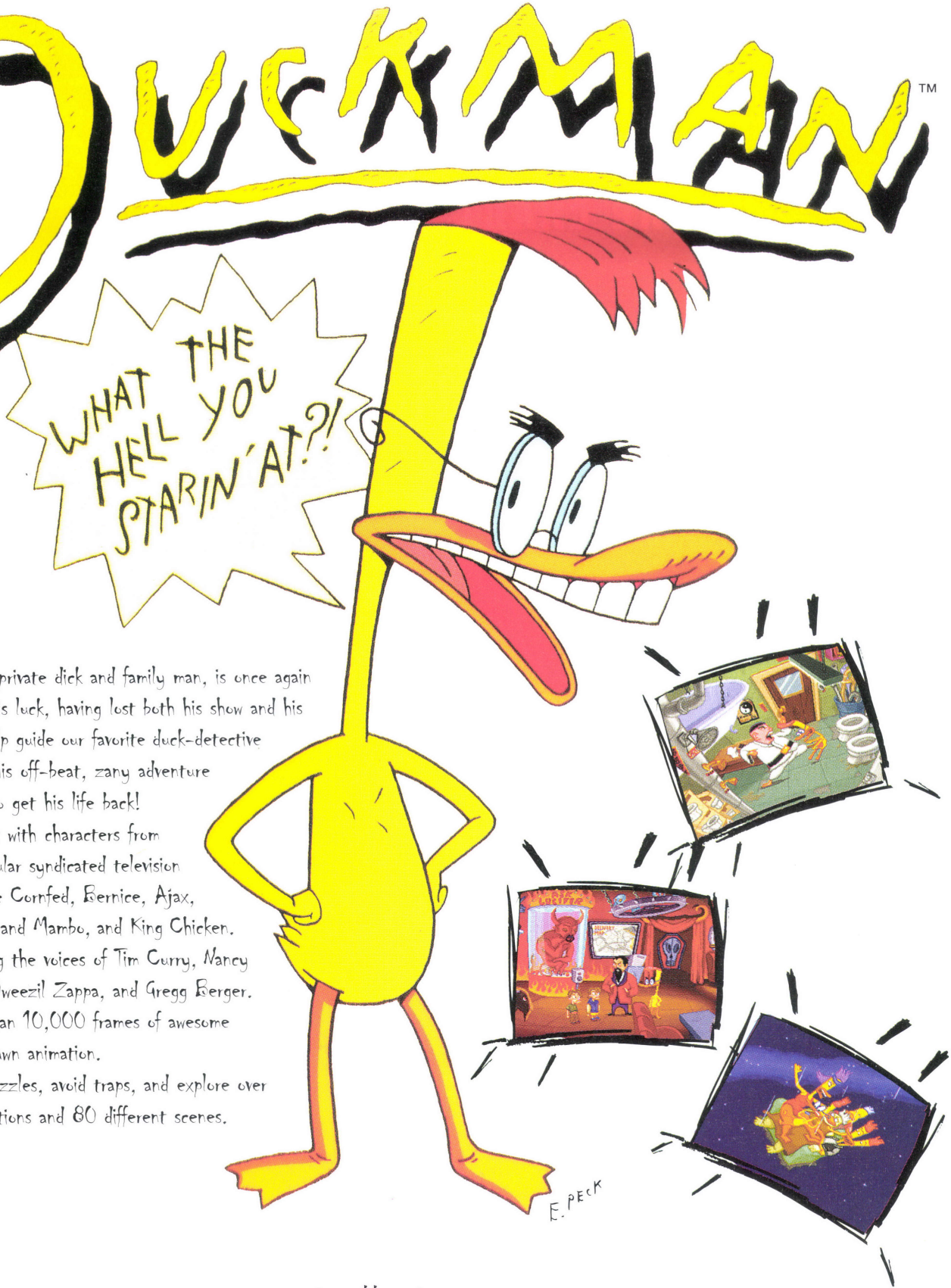
GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	C

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Excellent presentation gives way to dated play, annoying dialogue.

DEVELOPER:	Telstar Electronic Studios
PUBLISHER:	Sir-Tech 800-447-1230
WEB:	www.sir-tech.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95/DOS 5.0 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX/66, 8MB RAM, VESA 1.2, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$40

DUCKMAN™



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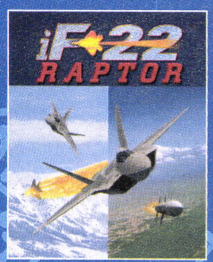

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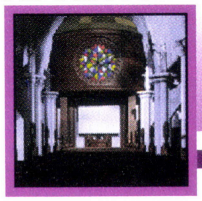


Shivers Two: Harvest of Souls

Rock videos do have hidden meanings

By Peter Olafson

Cyclone's version of Tickle Me Elmo? I don't think so.

It's been said that the people of America's small towns know how to live, but you couldn't prove that assertion with Cyclone, Ariz. Shivers Two: Harvest of Souls finds you freshly arrived in this landslide-locked little burg (Population: You) to discover that your rock-band friends are missing. So is virtually everyone else. Guess who's been elected head roadie?

This handsomely-appointed town is more or less open to your prying hands, and veterans of Shivers will be pleasantly surprised at the secrets, would-be inventory objects, and good gossip it holds. You can extract clues from the band's videos (which can be viewed on TV sets around town) and the contents of the townfolks' answering machines, bureau drawers, and wastebaskets. Exploration pays: The more you poke around, the higher your point total. Navigation is simple via a map mode that means you don't have to trudge the long way around to places you've already visited.

It seems the story has loose ties to Native American mythology. Your object is to retrieve a dozen prayer sticks from their hiding places around town and a nearby mine (typically by solving artful graphical puzzles) and return them to a hidden room off a nearby canyon.

To open the door to that "Kiva" you'll need to find symbols on the walls of the adjoining canyon and then solve Tangram puzzles (ancient Chinese paper-shape "jigsaws"). If your "life essence" runs out—either from game events, hauling prayer sticks around, or the wall carvings taking pot shots at you—well, that's what saved games are for.

Compared to the original Shivers, designer Marcia Bales has worked hard at building up the story, clothing the conundrums with more adventure-game fabric, and making them feel practical and more intrinsic to the game. In one puzzle, you have to line up the numbered balls in the local church's bingo machine. To get inside a bank, you have to balance the books. Elsewhere, you're manipulating a bat to clear a buggy basement. Only occasionally did I feel a puzzle was built merely to make my in-game life a bit harder.

A better game engine has certainly helped. Movement is still Myst-like, but 360-degree rotation has been added, a la Zork: Nemesis, as well as the ability to look up or down about 30 degrees. This creates a sense of seeing what you want to see, and not just what the game's prepared to show you. Cyclone isn't a slideshow—it's more of a place. (And a weird one.)

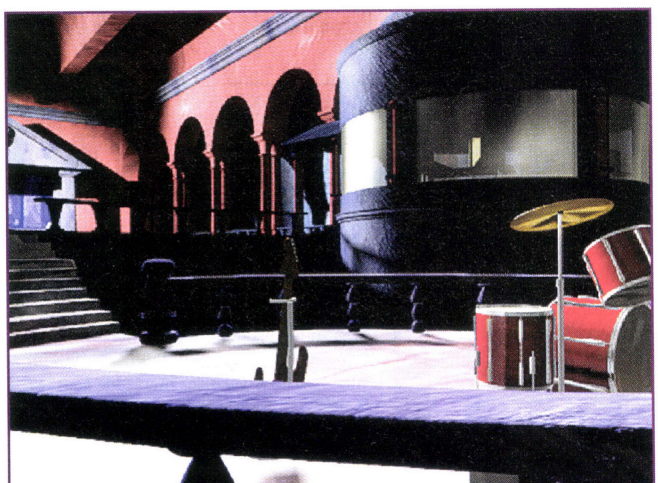
Innovative touches also help: An Internet link allows you to chat with other players while you're playing the game—a nice addition to what is traditionally the most solitary of computer-game genres. Also, the architecture of some of the game's puzzles has been left open; using text files, you can edit their layout and share your wickedness with your friends.

At the same time, however, Shivers Two exhibits what I call the "Nickelodeon factor"; that is, it's a touch generic. It's never really scary, and your nemesis proves downright laughable. It's rarely murderously difficult. And while I like the rock-video concept, musically, it's strictly middle of the road.

Moreover, the game occasionally struck me as a bit sluggish on a 200MHz Pentium, and some of the 3D graphics display a "fishbowl" effect. In addition, I think the manual gives away too much—not only the lyrics to all the songs in the videos, but explanations of the objectives of each of the graphical puzzles.

After all, Shivers Two isn't a chore that has to be finished on deadline. It's an adventure—and a pretty decent one at that.

Cyclone's café is almost...hip!



Another pretty-but-forbidding locale in the town of Cyclone.

SHIVERS TWO: HARVEST OF SOULS

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS :	B
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	B

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Innovative in spots, but it lacks a certain punch.

PUBLISHER:	Sierra On-Line 800-757-7707
WEB:	www.sierra.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95/Win 3.1 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX/266, 12MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, Win 95
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Don't erase the messages you find on the answering machine in your room: the numbers in them are important. ▼ Use the gum you find in the motel foyer to cover the red light on television sets; that way, you can watch the videos without being hypnotized. (Just bored.) ▼ Be sure to put the prayer sticks in the holes with the matching symbol; otherwise, you'll have to go back and get them again.

Moto Racer GP

Awesome graphics make this arcade racer smoke.

If you like your racing games to be long on fun and short on realism, you'll love Moto Racer. This is the way moto-cross racing should be done: from the safety of your computer screen. None of those bothersome hassles like wrecking your bike, breaking your leg, or scraping large chunks of asphalt from your flesh as you skid on your ass at 100 miles an hour when you fall off. Where's the fun in that? But a good, entertaining sim—that's a different story.

Get your Moto running

The first thing that stands out are the superb graphics. While good on a typical setup, the graphics in this D3D-supported game are truly amazing on a machine with a 3D accelerator card. You can race on eight different courses, including the Great Wall of China, a "Dirt Arena," and a snow course. Choose from one of 16 cycles, offering varying degrees of acceleration, speed, and handling; then select from Practice mode or Single Race mode, where you race against 23 others, or go for a championship season in Grand Prix mode.

Though the action has a definite arcade bent, winning isn't a given, even on the Easy setting. It would have been nice if you could drift a little bit off course to change the pace and throw in some more uncertainty; as it is, you almost seem stuck on the course, and for a racing game, that's a bit of a problem. But Moto Racer really comes alive when you go head-to-head with a buddy or in an eight-player LAN game, where you can see who's really king of the dirt hill. The action is fast and the clashes brutal; the whole event is a nitro-charged rush.

It won't challenge NASCAR for racing sim of the year, and it isn't as brutally wonderful as Road Rash, but this one's definitely good for a spin around the old Great Wall.

—Shane Mooney

MOTO RACER GP

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B

Gorgeous, adrenaline-pumping fun.

Developer	Delphine Software
Publisher:	BMG Interactive
Web:	www.bmg.com.au/interactive/
Platform:	Win 95 CD
Requires:	P90, 16MB RAM, 2MB SVGA
Recommended:	MMX system, 3D accelerator card
Street Price:	$50

Power F1

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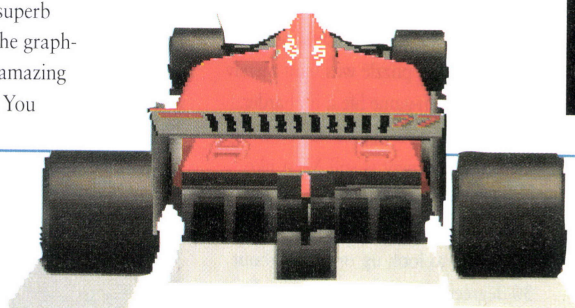


Good, clean racing fun

Those of you who like Formula One racing but found MicroProse's F1GP2 unwieldy should give Power F1 a try. Put simply, it's one hell of a racer.

Power F1's stats are based on the 1995 Formula One season data, and all 17 tracks are very realistically represented. Compared to more arcade-based racing games, the courses are a bit plain in terms of layout and road obstacles; nevertheless, they're challenging and wrought with enough curves to keep you on your proverbial driving toes.

Better yet, the game is chock full of options to accommodate players of all skill levels—arcade and simulation modes, user-friendly steering, and a variety of ways to customize your car. Options such as auto-braking, steering hints, and optional damage are just the thing for beginners, while full simulation modes and a complete auto-body shop that lets you tweak important car systems should keep hardcores drivers ridin' high.

Multiplayer options include serial, split-screen, and a six-player network mode. There's built-in steering-wheel support, too, though configuring controls isn't nearly as convenient as it should have been. Also, Win 95 support is rather spotty: the game doesn't always give you full sound unless the full DOS install is used.

The graphics, on the other hand, are excellent—in hi-res, they look almost 3D-accelerated—and the game runs fairly well on lower-end Pentiums. The sound effects are superb as well, perfectly capturing the feel and intensity of the race.

And did I mention that the game comes bundled with a copy of Big Red Racing, a gem in its own right? For Formula One fans of all kinds, this is a great deal.

—Jason D'Aprile

If you try hard enough, you can score some great-looking wipeouts.

POWER F1

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	B

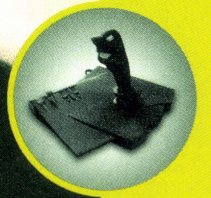
Whether you're newbie or pro, you'll love this formula racer.

Developer:	Teque London
Publisher:	Eidos Interactive
Web:	www.eidosinteractive.com
Platform:	DOS/Win 95 CD
Requires:	486/66, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, 1MB SVGA, VESA 2.0
Recommended:	P90, 16MB RAM
Street Price:	$50

Blackhawk

GrIP Game System

Firebird 2



GamePad Pro

Thunderbird

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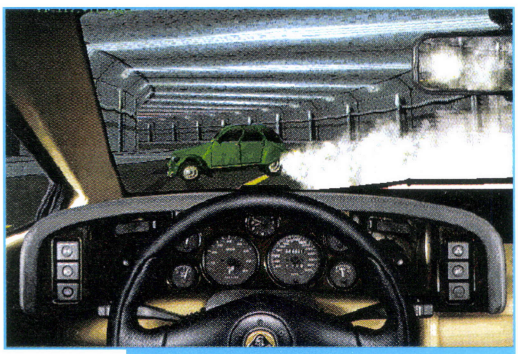
Need for Speed II

Fast and furious

By Robert J. Elisberg

Oh, the joys of breaking the speed limit without getting a ticket. Maybe there *is* a driver's heaven.

Need for Speed II starts out impressively, with movies of sleek Ferraris and Jaguars roaring across your screen. Of course, the heart of any racing game is the beloved cars themselves, and the game lets you choose from eight classy models, including the McLaren F1, Lotus Espirit V8, Italdesign Cala, Ferrari F50, and Jaguar XJ220. A Showcase screen goes into great spec detail about these hot cars, along with a slide show, video, and history of the manufacturer.



You can race by yourself, against a single opponent, or in a full-blown competition.

It's also in this options area that NFS II lets you join the pit crew and configure a car to your heart's content. Most players probably won't want to get their hands that greasy, and will simply accept the defaults and go, but for real, racing-mad fanatics, there's the option to fine-tune details like gear ratios and brake bias, as well as setting the front and rear downforce to affect your steering.

Armed with your favorite car, you're ready to choose your raceway. Six detailed courses take you around the world, from the Himalayas to the Mediterranean to the Australian Outback and the Pacific Rim.

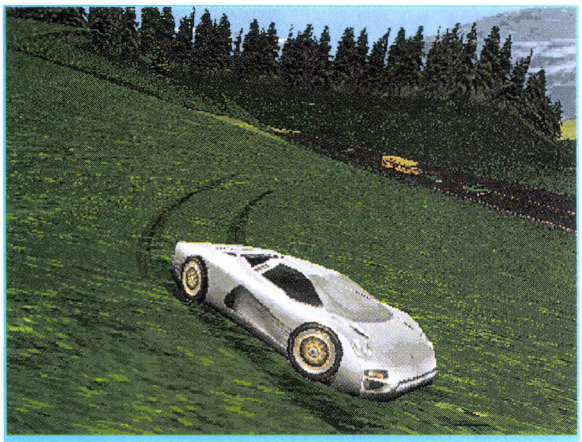
As for the type of competition, you can race all by your lonesome, or select the number of cars to compete against in a single race (either 1 or 11). You can choose a full-blown tournament, or go for a "knockout," where the losing car is dropped out (but where you can earn a bonus track). There's also two-person play available via split-screen, direct modem connection, or serial-cable link, as well as an eight-person network-play option over an IPX network (which has the added advantage of allowing all eight players to play from a single CD).

As your anticipation revs, it's finally time to start your engine. While the cross-country races provide good entertainment, the graphics and action are much less than the exciting opening screens promised. But make no mistake: there's still a lot of fun, challenging racing here, especially on the more advanced courses. Racing through the winding streets and snowy mountains of Nepal is a treat, though it's extremely difficult, especially in the more realistic simulation mode.

The more advanced the course, the more detailed the surrounding graphics. You can view races from four perspectives—the driver's seat provides the most realism, but the overhead gives a more interesting sense of the race. As involving as the game gets, the graphics don't really do these sleek machines the justice they deserve.

As you blast around the countryside, a Heads Up Display provides important details, such as your current race position, time, and track map. What's there is well-presented, but there are gaps. For instance, you're only given lap time, not your cumulative effort. It'd also be nice to have a full map of the track on screen, not just the section where your car is currently located. And how about a mileage counter?

Select traffic to create slow-moving obstacles along the road.



Arcade mode is much more forgiving than simulation mode for correcting crashes and wrong turns.

That said, multiplayer racing is great over a LAN. Simple controls make jumping into a game easy, and once you're there, pushing these high-performance cars to the limit is intense, particularly with traffic. A replay option lets you relive those close finishes or spectacular failures—great for backing up bragging rights.

In the long run, NFS II will prove entertaining for people whose veins flow with 10w40 oil. For everyone else, it'll be fun for several laps, but is likely to run out of gas.

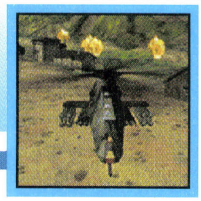
NEED FOR SPEED II

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	**B**
MULTIPLAYER:	**B+**

Great cars, good multiplay, but this race could have been better.

PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525
WEB:	www.ea.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 10MB HD, 4X CD-ROM drive, Hi Color video
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 70MB HD, steering wheel
STREET PRICE:	$40

CHEATS ▼ Type these codes at the main menu (you'll hear an ignition sound if done correctly): **hollywood**: bonus track; **slip**: slip-and-slide mode; **pioneer**: gives all secret cars a super engine; **bus**: school bus; **commanche**: Jeep Comanche; **semi**: big truck; **armytruck**: army truck; **snowtruck**: Mercedes Unimog; **vwbug**: VW Beatle; **volvo**: Volvo; **bmw**: BMW; **mercedes**: Mercedes; **miata**: Miata; **jeepyj**: Jeep YJ; **quattro**: Audi Quattro; **vanagon**: VW Combi; **landcruiser**: Toyota Landcruiser; **vwfb**: VW Fastback.



Comanche 3

By Peter Olafson

Time for a little sub-busting.

PC GAMES A LIST

Nap of the Earth at its best

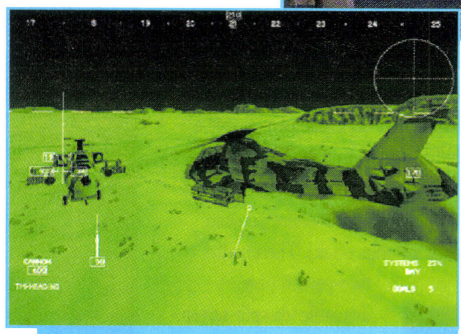
NovaLogic was one of the first companies to make flight sims look like real life. Who played Comanches 1, 2, and Werewolf and didn't admire those lite chopper sims' rounded hills, picturesque installations, and taut explosions?

But none of that prepared me for Comanche 3. This is a luminously real experience that transcends the limitations of computer flight. There's no sense of participating in a mockup. I wasn't sitting at the computer; I was sitting at the controls.

Terrain in Comanche 3—the debut of Voxel Space 2 technology—has the flow of real terrain. Buildings look like real buildings, and the range of internal and external views and the green-screen in-cockpit monitor further enhances the effect. Enemy vehicles and choppers are splendidly presented in their own right, and I think that I shall never see a flight-game tree as realistic as a Comanche 3 tree—now there's a claim to fame.

Fortunately, you're well-armed against ever having to see the enemy too close up. The RAH-66 Comanche attack copter is equipped with Hellfire air-to-ground missiles, air-to-air Stingers, a 20mm cannon, and, frequently, the ability to call down artillery strikes on a target—which is like having a friend among the Gods.

Together with a wingman (who is nothing more than reusable ordinance; essentially, you can tell him "attack my target" and that's that), you'll fight the good fight in roomy air spaces over Odessa, Siberia, Cuba, and Saudi Arabia. Thrilling radio chatter, lashing winds, and the sound of distant explosions make these memorable missions feel like stories, and that's an invaluable distinction. This flight sim is also an adventure.



Trust your feelings during night missions.

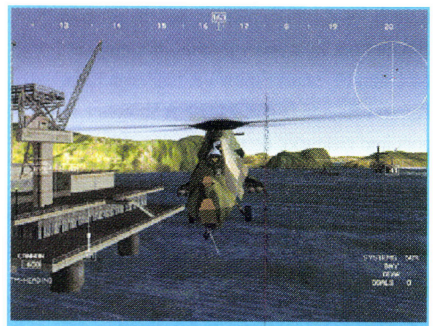
Once you've exhausted the 32 combat missions, a multiplayer option allows you to play in cooperative mode or beat up on your friends in four melee zones. The game supports IPX network, modem, and serial-cable connections.

Hell, it's a blast even when you go to pieces. Comanche 3 has absolutely the best crashes I've seen—an impression vigorously reinforced the first time my chopper went down above a slope. The perspective switched to a third-person view, and I watched the craft slam to earth and began to slide, burning, down the hill toward me. I couldn't help myself: I flinched (at least mentally) as if it was about to come through the screen.

The controls are detailed—every key seems to do something—without ever feeling complicated. I credit this to the half-dozen training missions, which strike the perfect balance of challenge and education.

If this all sounds more like an entertaining flying shoot-'em-up than a sim, try the advanced flight model, which requires a much more measured, attentive approach. Here, the restless creature inside the Comanche is given full rein with an incredibly realistic flight model (according to helicopter pilots who worked on the project at all stages). It becomes a challenge to simply reach your target without blowing yourself up. For example, in colder climates you'll find it more difficult to hold the Comanche in a hover, due to changes in air density.

If you fly this high, you will die.



This is one mean whirly-bird.

True, the game is a bit too tightly scripted to reward replays, the missions are fixed, and it might be nice if the progression of the campaigns was more flexible. And I found the generic pre-mission rock score intensely irritating. (I really wish composers would forget *Top Gun*.)

But I'd suffer through a lot to play a game as good as Comanche 3. This is glorious. Just glorious.

COMANCHE 3

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

A- OVERALL

Flashy, entertaining—and realistic.

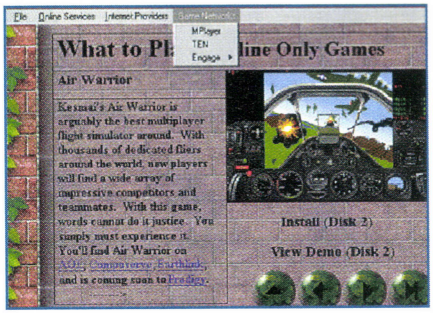
PUBLISHER:	NovaLogic 818-880-4997
WEB:	www.novalogic.com
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P100, 16MB RAM, 20MB HD, VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, VESA graphics for hi-res
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ The "Showdown" mission can prove tricky. Keep an eye peeled for ground units around the #2 waypoint and send off a Hellfire the moment one is located. (You only have two, so make them count.) ▼ Make sure your air-to-air Stinger missiles have a clear path to their target. When operating at low altitudes, they're prone to detonating against hillsides en route.

Net Warrior

Introducing: online action

So you indulge in games like Quake, Duke, and MechWarrior 2 on your own, but you're fascinated with the thought of playing against human opponents, maybe in Finland or Australia? Net Warrior takes a stab at starting you off.



The package aims to get you up and running in the world of online action games, in part by supplying you with the tools you'll need to survive: a month of free Internet access to ISPs like EarthLink, Prodigy, CompuServe, and MSN; online-gaming-provider software for TEN, Mplayer, IGZ, and more; demos and game enablers; Web browsers; and information on where to find more.

It's all on two CDs, and Net Warrior follows through on its easy-to-install, easy-to-use ideology with an intuitive, if uninspired, interface.

If you're already connected to the Internet, you probably don't need this. But for the novice, it's a good place to start. And the save on download time is a boon for any online gamer. *—Amy Crigger*

PUBLISHER: Macmillan Digital USA 800-910-0099
WEB: www.mcp.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: $30

B+ OVERALL

Online Gaming Starter Kit

You won't find the action angle of Net Warrior 'round here. Quick, easy access to a range of classic board and card games, as well as some educational trivia games, is what this guy's all about.

Test drive a few family favorites

ISP software and game demos for such classics as checkers, bingo, backgammon, bridge, hearts, and blackjack form the backbone of the Online Gaming Starter Kit. There's a good selection of trivia-game demos, too, highlighted by the immensely popular You Don't Know Jack. If you're looking for a quick way to find family-oriented online gaming, this is a good option.

And yet, while it seems packed with necessary products, there really isn't a great deal of content here, and the graphic interface is monotonous. The best thing about this pack is that it saves you lots of time on downloading demos and searching for online-game services. It also stays true to being extremely easy to install and use. But that's not quite enough. *—Amy Crigger*

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WEB: www.mcp.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: $30

C- OVERALL

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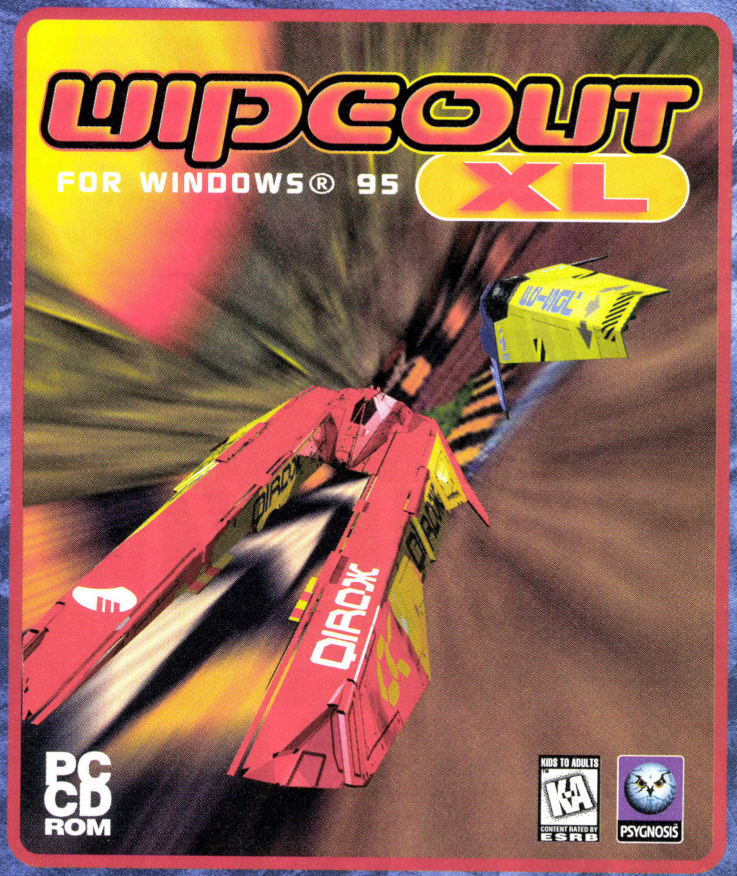

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- 3DFx Card
- 3D Labs Permedia
- Rendition Verite
- ATI Rage Mk2

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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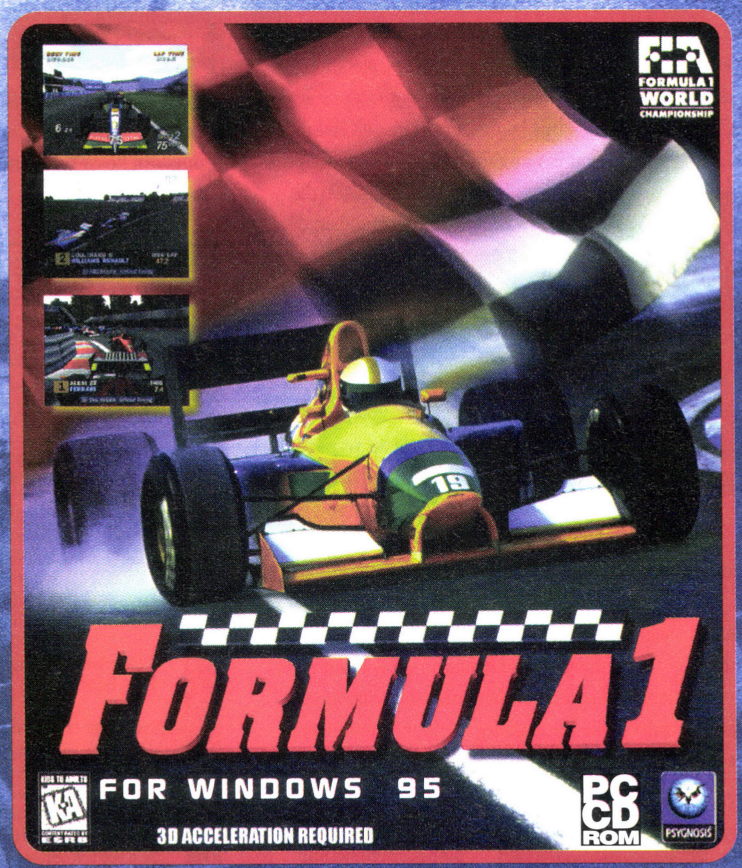

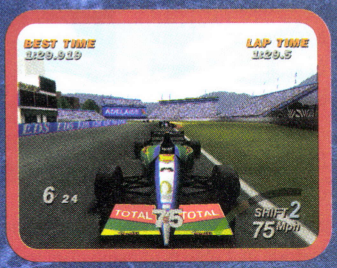

Cutting-edge 3D graphics supported by the following cards:

- Matrox Mystique
- 3DFx Card
- 3D Labs Permedia
- Rendition Verite

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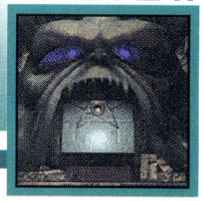


Realms of Arkania III: Shadows Over Riva

Intense role playing for RPG diehards

By Barry Brenesal

Does anybody besides myself get that comet-viewing thrill when a well-loved RPG series swings through with a new release? The Arkania comet has blazed into view during a particularly bleak period for RPG gamegazers, and it's a welcome return.

If you haven't played any of the Realms of Arkania series before, a quick recap should bring you up to speed. This fantasy role-playing series is set in a pseudo-medieval Scandinavian universe notable for a game system with the detail of a full table-top RPG. There are 50-plus skills and more than 80 spells for your 6 team members to choose from, be rated for, and improve as they gain experience. Each character also maintains statistics for 7 positive attributes (wisdom, agility, charisma, etc.) and 7 negative attributes (violent temper, acrophobia, and more).

Rendered cut scenes add impact to the story.

Atmospheric lighting gives the dated graphics some real mood.

Combat allows for a sophisticated degree of tactical, turn-based control on an isometric, 3D landscape, which isn't seen in any other computer games these days. In addition, there are enough activities to perform and objects to manipulate to keep hardcore RPG devotees happy for a millennia.

Riva uses the same game engine as the previous two releases, Blade of Destiny and Star Trail, with some tweaking around the edges. The biggest change is a complete online manual with hypertext links—useful when you really don't want to page through the printed documentation for the name of a particular spell or the attributes that affect a given skill.

The standard options of complete user control over your party and computer-controlled combat for any of your characters have been joined by instantaneous combat resolution. This isn't likely to prove very popular, however. Riva's audience consists of players who relish the thrill of every successful attack and cringe as a spell misfires or a weapon breaks. And given the series' hardcore RPG approach to character generation, advancement, item manipulation, and environment, Riva's new easy combat isn't likely to boost its overall appeal to guzzlers of RPG Lite.

Nor is that surprising, for the Arkania series takes place in a complex world that repays the effort spent learning its ways. Riva in particular draws you in with quests, plots, and counterplots among its various factions. Even its "good guys" (the human, dwarven, and elven races) sometimes war with each other, and everybody looks with suspicion on the belligerent orcs and their distant cousins, the half-orc/elves.

Arkania's visuals have admittedly grown dated, but they have done so gracefully. The 320-by-200, 256-color screens appear smudgy in data and item menus, yet they still create very atmospheric city and combat backdrops. There's far more texture-mapping in Shadows Over Riva than in its predecessors, and the dungeons and towns have more complicated physical layouts that employ angles rather than square corridors and rooms.

One thing I could definitely do without is the return of several of the series' annoying little quirks, like the inability to "look" at an item by simply double-clicking on it. (You have to click and drag the item up to a character's eye icon.) Nor is anything hot-keyed, which means you have to right- and left-click through a series of extensive menus and submenus to select options.

It wouldn't be an RPG without a cheesy bartender.

Shadows Over Riva is reportedly the last in the Arkania series. Technically a little long in the tooth, it nevertheless remains capable of generating an engrossing tale and providing a thoroughly detailed fantasy role-playing environment. Few games can boast such virtues; we give this one a strong recommendation.

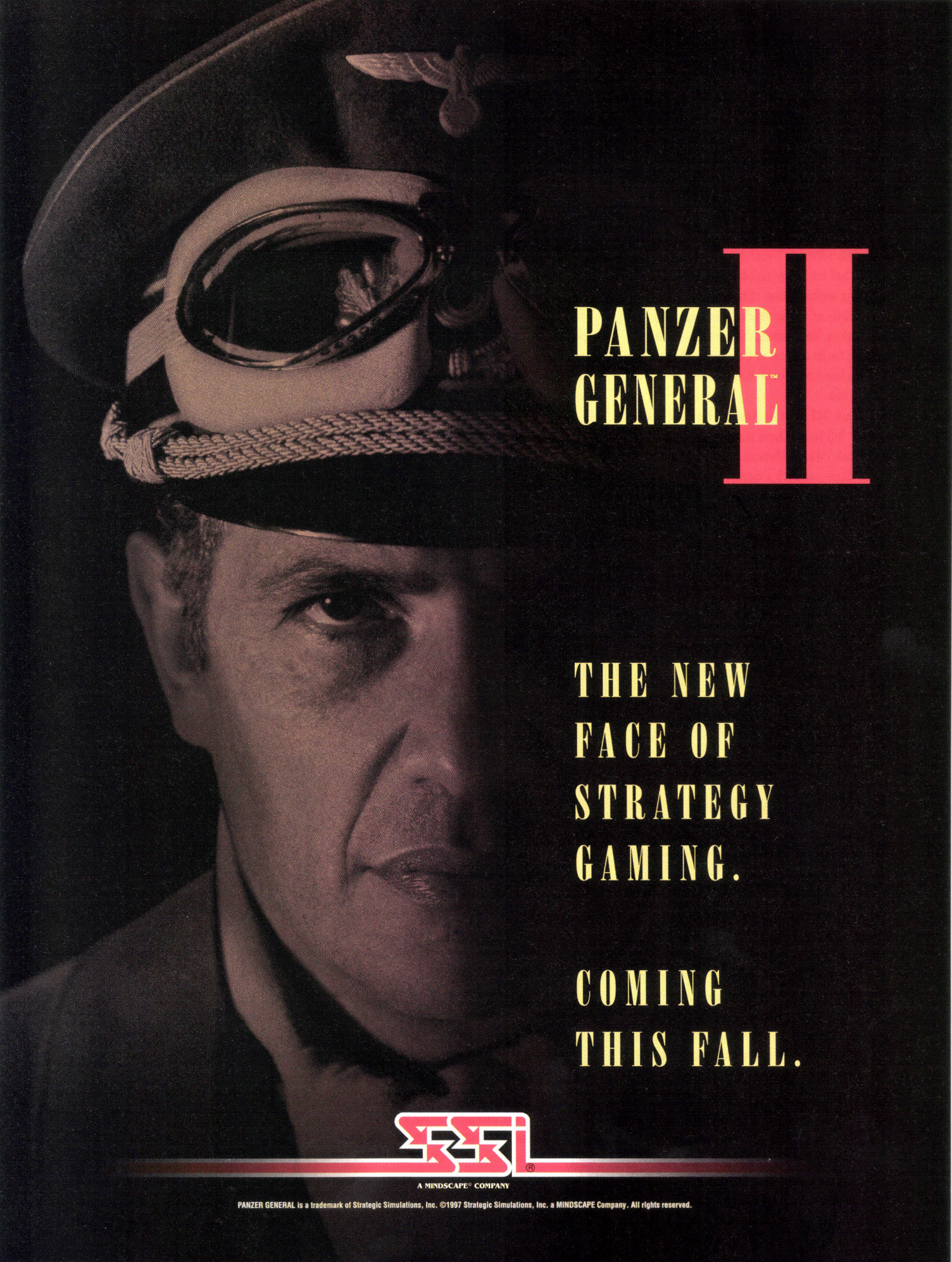
SHADOWS OVER RIVA

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	C
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Visually, it's a bit dated, but the gaming system's great and the story absorbing.

DEVELOPER:	Attic Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Sir-Tech Software 800-447-1230
WEB:	www.sir-tech.com
PLATFORM:	DOS CD (supports Win 95)
REQUIRES:	486/33, 8MB RAM, 40MB HD, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ Need money? Move directly outside town, set up camp, and send your party member with the best Herb Lore (usually a druid) foraging for herbs. You can return to town and sell them. ▼ After your early battles, grab all the loot you can and head back to town. The shops will buy anything you find, and you can use the cash on better weapons, healing, and magical potions. ▼ There's a graveyard in town with a building in its northeast corner. Arm your party, save your game, and enter for your first battle. ▼ Digging in the graveyard should reveal some interesting underground passageways. Again, save before you enter. ▼ Tarik at the Harbour Maid can provide you with some useful early leads. ▼ Look for buildings that offer new services, such as massages, baths, and delousing. (Yes, delousing. It doesn't touch your health, but it can wreck havoc with your charisma, and that affects many skills.) ▼ There's a mapmaker in town who can sell you a map to the place. ▼ Sometimes it pays to ask people the same question twice; they'll reveal more.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iM1A2 Abrams

More tank-busting fun

By Peter Olafson

It's no secret that the tank-sim genre has been running on one tread for most of the decade. Incredibly, the industry's most successful effort is still MicroProse's 8-year-old M1 Tank Platoon—unmatched for happy simplicity of approach, beguiling sophistication of tactics, and the utter authenticity of the battlefield experience. There was nothing like spotting the outriders of an advancing Soviet column to kick you in the ass, and nothing like a night-tank battle to put the fear of God in you.

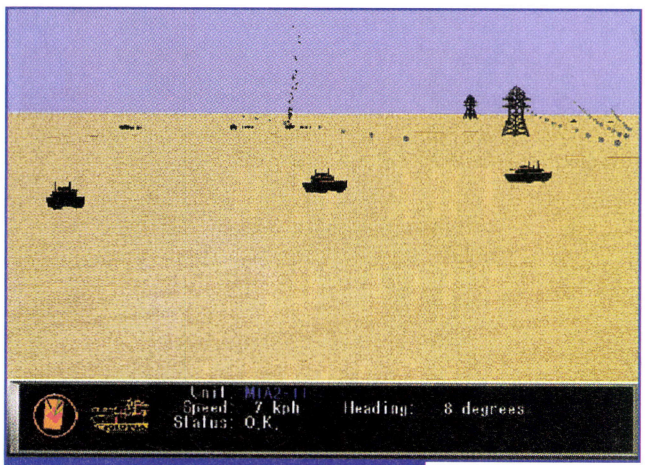
At last, M1 creators Arnold Hendrick and "Wild" Bill Stealey have teamed up once again to publish iM1A2 Abrams: America's Main Battle Tank—and it's a dandy. M1's basic strengths have been built around, and the result, while not quite a knight in camouflage armor, is the best tank sim in ages.

A Soviet-made T-72a buys the farm.

To your orders, be they "turn left," lay down a protective smoke screen, or the mass destruction of "group fire."

It's in these frays (especially in the external views) that iM1A2 shows a touch of the old M1 enchantment: muzzle flashes in the night, the crisp crackle of a radio that rarely broadcasts good news, the volcanic upheaval of a tank in torment. To add a touch of realism, units take incremental damage depending on where they're hit. And it's oh-so-satisfying when the Serb tank destroyer that's been patiently nailing your units from on high gets wasted.

Best of all, iM1A2 has choices. You're active throughout: not just on the battlefield itself, but figuring out which battlefield to choose, what type of battle you're going to fight, and what additional units to bring under your command. It *feels* like war. The locales are drawn from life, and defeat doesn't mean Game Over, but merely Game Different—and that's real.



Those little grassy things next to the enemy tanks? Infantry. (But not for long.)

Players command a core of two Abrams platoons through three campaigns—Iran, Bosnia, and the Ukraine (which sees the return of that old Democratic menace, the Russians)—at levels ranging from local tank god to gunner.

The quick reference guide that abets the superb 192-page manual is an experience in intimidation, but the basic controls are simple enough for anyone to use. Just right-click on a unit to pull up its command menu and designate a series of waypoints, set up strategy, or jump straight into the 3D fray and show your men how it's done. Using the overhead-view map mode will stand you in good stead. Your units are pretty quick to identify and report sources of incoming fire and to respond

For all that, this sim does have some rough edges. The tanks look sharp, but the terrain, while textured, is bland, featureless, and subject to some odd perspective distortions (an issue a planned 3D-accelerator-card patch may address). The enemy AI seems to have been modeled on meat grinders, but multiplayer support for up to eight over a LAN bypasses this limitation.

Compared to other wargames, there are some more flaws. For one thing, there's not a real smooth flow to the missions. In particular, the absence of M1's promotions-and-decorations sequence makes the campaign games feel like a set of separate scenarios. I'd like to have seen a little more personnel and equipment management. I miss the immediacy of the original M1's "Move to" command, and wonder why it's not in the unit menus. I experienced incidents of friendly fire with unreasonable frequency. And I'd like to see a way to easily wrap disparate units together for assignment of a single destination—perhaps along the lines of Command & Conquer's drag-and-drop boxes.

So there's room for improvement. But don't let that put you off: iM1A2 is the best tank sim to appear in years. With a tune-up and a few spare parts, it could be the champion for a while to come.

IM1A2 ABRAMS

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	C+
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	**B**
MULTIPLAYER:	**B**

One of the best tank sims in years—with a few issues to resolve.

DEVELOPER:	Charybdis Enterprises
PUBLISHER:	Interactive Magic Entertainment 800-559-0434
WEB:	www.imagicgames.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX/66, 16MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, sound card, joystick
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Choppers are your worst enemy. Take them out quickly. ▼ Keep the terrain mode on your map enabled; it's often instrumental in figuring out how to set up the best shot. ▼ Don't feel compelled to follow the pre-set paths for your two tank units. It's sometimes useful to keep your units within hailing distance, so you can bring overwhelming force to bear should the need arise.

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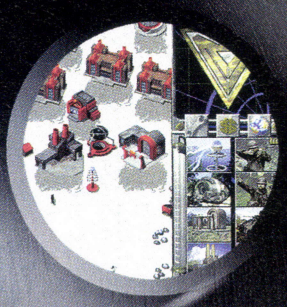

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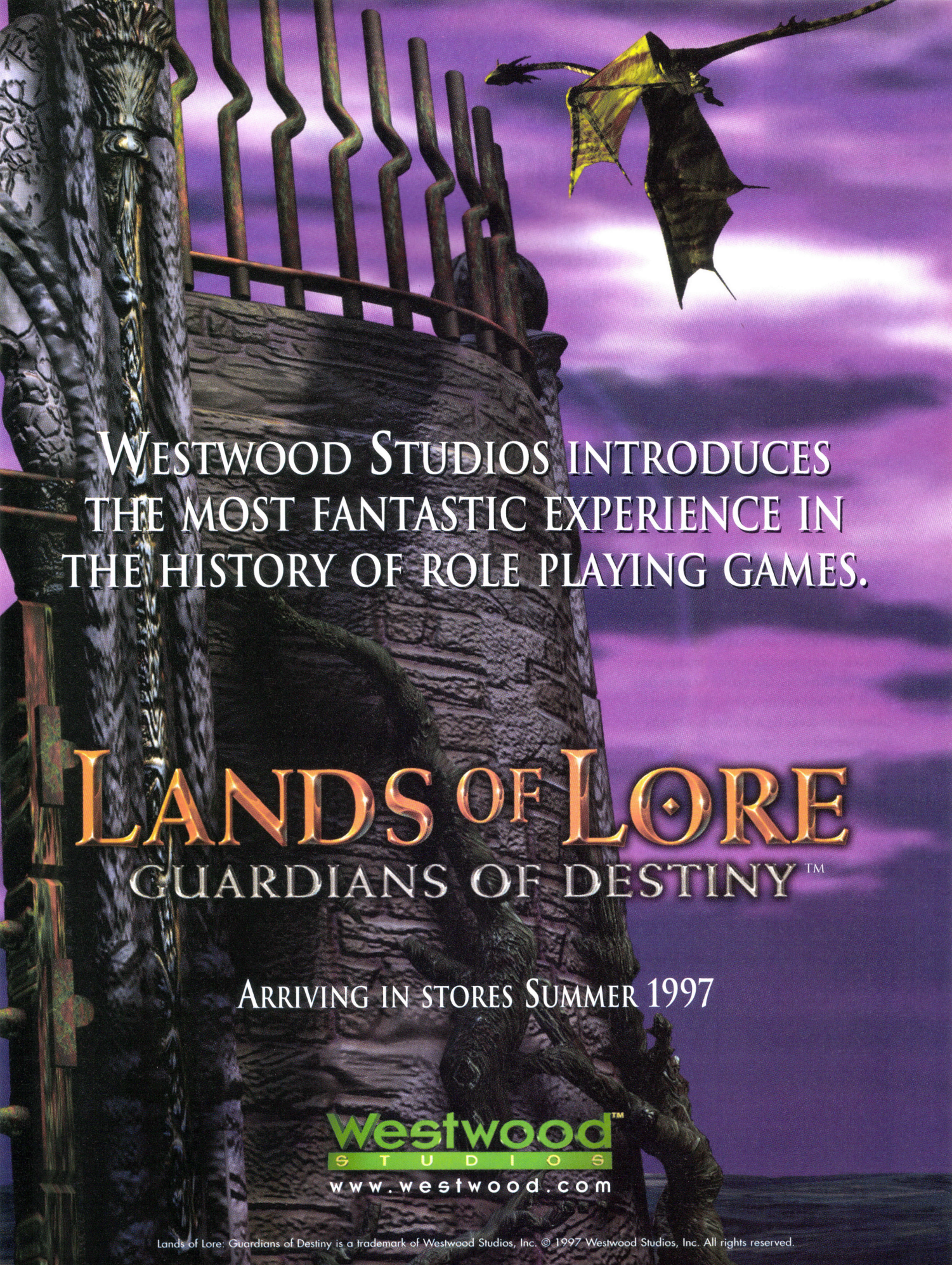

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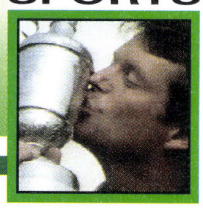


British Open Championship Golf

Looking Glass keeps it on the fairway

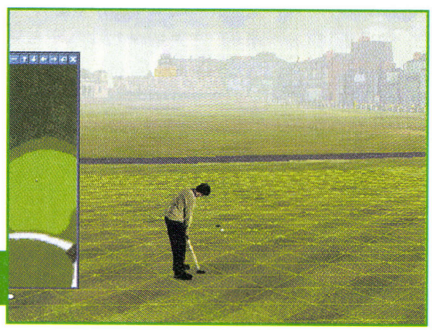
By "The Royal and Ancient" Daniel Morris

The game of golf is one of long and proud tradition, and nowhere is this tradition taken more seriously than at the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews in Scotland. The world renowned Old Course at this venerable establishment has been modeled in great detail, along with Royal Troon (another course to hold the famed championship) for the first time in any golf sim.

Looking Glass Technologies scored the exclusive license to this hallowed tournament and has given us a thoughtful and comprehensive simulation of the championship. While it's a respectable golf game in almost every way, its lack of multiplayer options is an ill-played shot into a sand trap. That's too bad, because BOCG would have been a very enjoyable network/modem game. It's getting increasingly inexcusable for sports titles to lack LAN and modem options, and this game suffers tremendously for it. Players have to settle for hotseat golf on a single system. Given that competing products offer comparable or better golf simulations and include multiplayer options, BOCG bogeys right off the first tee.

The game itself isn't bad at all. Its graphics aren't up to the dazzling standards of Links LS or Jack Nicklaus 4, but it captures these austere courses in all their charm and rain and wind-swept challenge. Its swing animations, captured from pros like Vijay Singh, Jeff Sluman, Jesper Parnevek, David Duval, and four others (all of whom you can play as or against), are great. It's played with the traditional three-click swing for every shot but putting. This is handled with a horizontal bar marked off with distances, and gives you a nicely different feel from playing the other shots. Ball physics and roll are up to snuff, making great use of the crazy bounces and runs for which the uneven St. Andrews courses are famous.

St. Andrews' typically terrible playing conditions are accurately simulated with adjustable fog, wind, and rain effects.



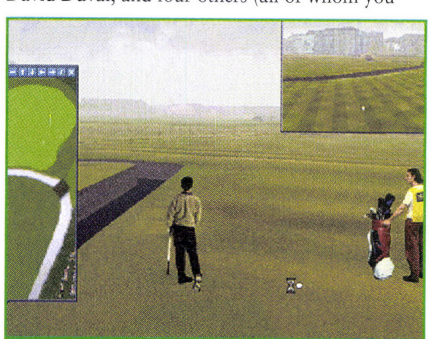
No pressure, no pressure...

Innovations include a handy shot-sculpting utility, which lets you create your own power fades, high lobs, and more. Also, there's a caddie who actually provides useful comments when asked, and crowds that react with wonderful accuracy and "spontaneity" to your shots. (A collective "Oh!" as your long putt skims the edge of the cup, or a murmuring trepidation that explodes into dismay as your dangerously stray drive finds a water hazard.)

The courses themselves sure aren't pretty: St. Andrews and Royal Troon are famously flat and featureless, and they are accurately captured here. For further authenticity, BOCG relies on presenting the tournament in an engagingly "TV-style" manner. From the opening screen of the tourney, the voices of announcers Michael Bradshaw and Jim McKay convey a good sense of the game being a televised broadcast of the Open, commenting on the action with a surprising canniness and relevance. Inevitably, their voice-overs get a bit tiresome and redundant, but they're still better than those in any other golf game.

Also, this is one sim where terrain and lie really make a difference. The gorse, heather, and savage rough make for frustrating play when you wander off the fairway. I loved that; recovery from errors in other games is often too easy. The unforgiving nature of these courses is ideally represented.

Unfortunately, this solid game suffers from its key limitations—only two courses and no serious multiplayer aspect. One can only hope that Looking Glass will remedy this in the future, and maybe venture to some of the UK's other historic courses (Turnbury springs immediately to mind) for add-ons. British Open Championship Golf is an engaging single-player title, if you can overlook its anachronistically limited play format.



The watery trench of Swilcan Burn is one of many hazards you'll need to evade.

BRITISH OPEN GOLF

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B

B- OVERALL

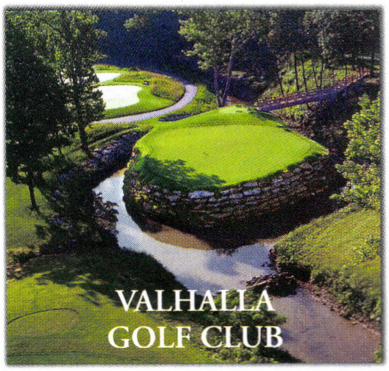
MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Rich, enjoyable golf. But where's the multiplay?

PUBLISHER:	Looking Glass Technologies 800-360-7455
WEB:	www.lglass.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P60, 12MB RAM, 40MB HD, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$49

TIPS

▼ Stay on the fairway! A bad lie in the rough can cost you several strokes as you hack your way out. ▼ Pay attention to the announcers, who occasionally whisper an immediately useful tip when you're sizing up a shot or putt. ▼ As a rule of thumb, try to land your approach shots at the back of the green when the pin is placed at the near edge, and at the front of the green when the placement is to the rear. Your shot wants to roll back or run forward accordingly.



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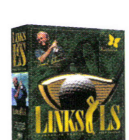

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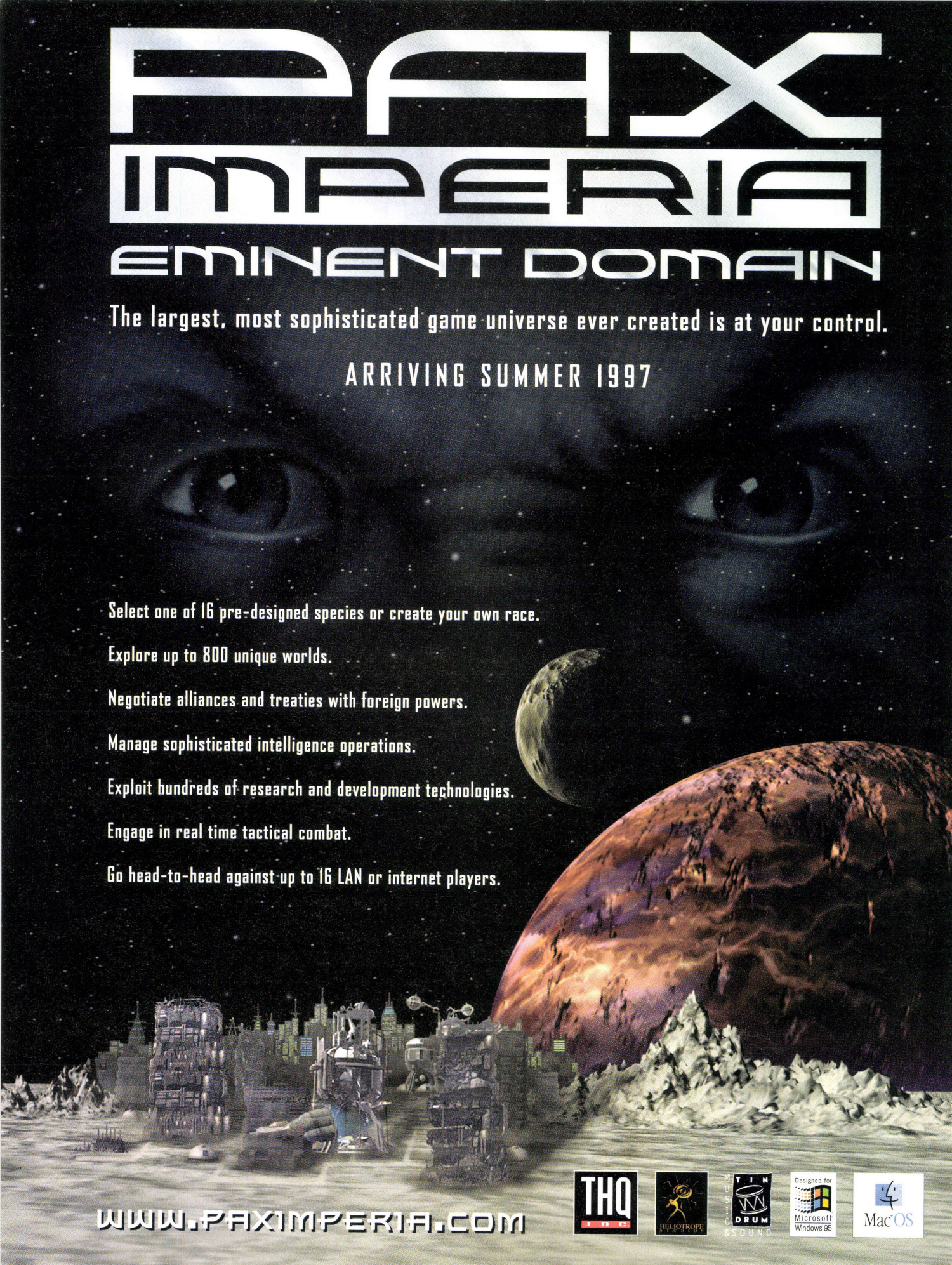
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Theme Hospital

Calling Dr. Howard, Dr. Fine, Dr. Howard...

By Barry Brenesal

Carefully monitor the activities throughout your large, rambling hospitals.

"God heals and the doctor takes the fee."
—Benjamin Franklin

What Ben would have to say after playing Theme Hospital is best left to the imagination. This real-time strategy game puts you in charge of the construction, budget, personnel, and research of more than 10 increasingly difficult hospital scenarios. Like other Bullfrog releases, including Theme Park and Gene Wars, it's extremely difficult to win, and achieves new heights—or depths—of strange humor.

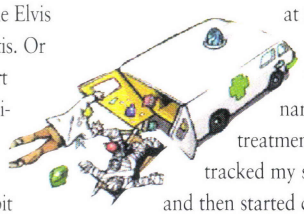
By *strange*, I mean treating diseases like Elvis Impersonation, Bloaty Head, and Hairy-itis. Or discovering that a doctor-for-hire lists "fart surfing" as one of his interests. This is typical of a game that fairly knocked me to the floor with its sly wit. The folks at Bullfrog should get out for long walks a bit more, I think.

In other respects, Theme Hospital is certainly realistic, in standard sim fashion. You design each room of your hospital for a specific purpose (usually diagnostic or treatment) and place equipment and furniture. Add radiators, soda machines, benches, restrooms, and plants to keep customers reasonably warm, happy, and spending money. Factor in organizing lines of research on new diseases and improved drug treatments, deciding which physicians receive extra training, and hiring each doctor, nurse, receptionist, and handyman, and you're ready for some pretty serious supervising.

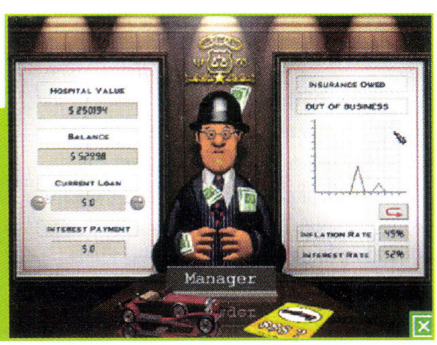
These things are typical of any micro-management strategy game, but Theme Hospital is into anal-retentive, atomic-level management. It requires you to personally reorganize receptionist queues, watch for and click-kill the occasional rat, and directly supervise the movements of individual janitors. You can't afford all the personnel you need, so you have to continually pick up and move the staff you've got. Guess who spots each treatment machine that's about to explode and each person who's contagiously ill, and has to remedy all these situations? Hint: it ain't C. Everett Koop.

In fact, it's nearly impossible to sit back and watch the whole zany picture, because you're continually pestered by Theme Hospital's niggling little details (even when you examine your detailed cashflow statement or adjust specific treatment costs, game time doesn't stop).

And then there are the recurrent AI problems. A person is first in line for General Diagnosis, but doesn't move. Somebody who is fifth in line and standing down the corridor approaches, and eventually enters the office. The person who was next rises a couple of minutes later and leaves in anger at the poor service—and it happens repeatedly. Once, when I was playing a scenario that required 40 successful treatments, the game correctly tracked my successful treatments to 18, and then started counting backward, deducting from my successes until I reached 11. That's no way to run a hospital.



Theme Hospital's graphics are SVGA, but they look and feel a bit scrappy, lacking the colorful clarity of the game's forerunner, Theme Park. The music, on the other hand, is appropriately innocuous, and the hospital loudspeaker comments are in keeping with the concept—"Visitors are asked to please not pet the vermin."



Your friendly bank manager will issue loans and tell you how much each insurance company owes you.

Adjust your charges if you're not making enough cash.

A lukewarm reception, then, to Theme Hospital. I diagnose its problem as Identity Confusion: it thinks it's a real-time strategy game with detailed economics/construction/resource management, and a frantic action/arcade game at the same time. Its main symptom: irritation. Recommended treatment: doses of SimCity 2000 and Lemmings taken alternately every 2 hours, until the differences between the game genres are clearly observed.

THEME HOSPITAL

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	C

C+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: (WITH PATCH)

This combination of detailed hospital management and arcade action is too frantic and too cerebral.

DEVELOPER:	Bullfrog Productions
PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525
WEB:	www.bullfrog.co.uk
PLATFORM:	DOS 6.22 CD (supports Win 95)
REQUIRES:	486DX2/66 (DOS)/Pentium (Win 95), 8MB RAM, 25MB HD, 1MB SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 16MB RAM, 55MB HD, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$52

TIPS ▼ BULLFROG REPORTS THAT A MULTIPLAYER PATCH WILL BE AVAILABLE ON THE COMPANY'S WEB SITE (LISTED ABOVE) BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS. ▼ Line the corridors by the main diagnostic rooms with benches. Patients don't mind waiting; they just hate standing. ▼ If you're strapped for cash and low on equipment, set your Guess at Cure slider to 70%. Accept the occasional death as a side effect of making money. ▼ When VIPs say they'd like to visit, don't blow them off unless things are in terrible shape. A pleased VIP translates into a bonus. ▼ If a patient arrives who clearly has a condition you don't want to treat, send him away as soon as possible. ▼ Watch for the occasional doctor or nurse who leaves his post and wanders around for no particular reason, even with a waiting queue.

Fragile Allegiance

In space, there is no excitement

By Peter Olafson

Haven't we met somewhere before? It's not just a corny line. Indeed, we have met: Fragile Allegiance (published in the U.S. by Interplay) is a glossy CD-ROM update of Gremlin Interactive's K240, which appeared on the Amiga back in 1994.

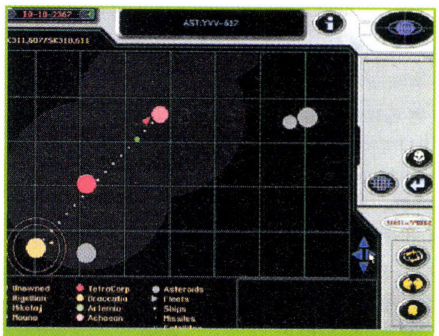
This PC version, from Caffi Software, adds well-considered features like diplomacy, black-market trading, colony supervisors, secret agents, and a multiplayer option to K240's quest for ore-rich asteroids. Consequently, it's a somewhat brawnier, more varied resource-management game.

Unfortunately, it's also rather tiresome, and some new features that begged to be added aren't part of the new package. Like K240—and Utopia, which preceded it—Fragile Allegiance combines SimCity-like construction with combat. The 11 scenarios and a configurable custom game find you manning a new Terran franchise in the Fragmented Sectors. Your job: create mining colonies on meandering asteroids, extract a range of ores (which you'll need to stock up on to produce spacecraft, which you sell to make ends meet), and expand your little slice of heaven at the expense of up to six alien rivals.

Only the random placement of ridges distinguishes the uniform craters.

What I enjoyed most is the level of detail. When you're offered or propose a non-aggression pact with an alien neighbor, you can negotiate its term, conditions, and the penalty you'll have to pay if you break it, as well as a trade proposal and counter-proposal. When you hire supervisors to handle the mundane tasks of colony maintenance, you can detail their areas of responsibility and the circumstances under which they'll contact you to report a problem (like an impending collision with a neighboring asteroid). For a price, you can assign spies to perform a whole range of specific types of sabotage and information retrieval.

Promising? Sadly, the game doesn't follow through on this theme. For instance, research isn't part of the package; instead, you buy blueprints from Sci-Tek's catalogue of the latest and greatest, which then arrive on the next ore transporter. The spacecraft models are fixed—you're responsible only for assigning shields and weapons—and combat, while initially fun to watch, is entirely automated.



Plot your invasion route using the star map.

At the same time, you have to handle certain mundane processes such as building basic structures manually, which is especially tedious when teleporting or transporting ore to the planet where it's collected and fielding incoming messages. Why weren't the repeated tasks automated?

Ship building lets you select various weapon hardpoints.

While the graphics are easy on the eyes, the asteroid backdrops are virtually identical; each colony is placed in a giant crater, with the only variation being the specifics of where you're permitted to put down structures.

Moreover, running under Windows 95, the game repeatedly balked, and eventually crashed to the desktop when it tried to load a particular diplomatic message. After this happened a few times, my allegiance to Fragile Allegiance became rather fragile indeed.

But, in the end, what bothered me most was the lack of a sense of process. Fragile Allegiance isn't just another Command & Conquer variant; indeed, its concept has more in common with Master of Orion II than C&C. Yet, the MOO games always provide a steady punctuation to let you know how you're doing. Fragile Allegiance doesn't progress so much as go on...and on...and on.

Without me, I'm afraid.

FRAGILE ALLEGIANCE

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	C-
MULTIPLAYER:	C

Detailed mining-colony administration hits vein of monotony.

DEVELOPER:	Gremlin Interactive
PUBLISHER:	Interplay 800-468-3775
WEB:	www.interplay.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 5.0 CD (works under Win 95)
REQUIRES:	486DX2/66, 8MB RAM, 36MB HD, VESA-compatible SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, modem
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ It's tempting to abandon an asteroid once you've run through its supply of ore, but that's not always wise. It's conceivable that more will be discovered later in the game. ▼ Don't fire your current colony supervisor until his replacement has arrived; that way, he'll be shipped out directly on the ore transporter and won't have as much opportunity to take revenge against your installations.

Imperium Galactica

A full career in space awaits

By Peter Olafson

One of the production screens. Here, you're building three makes of fighters.

Now, this is more like it. Imperium Galactica is a pleasant space opera from Hungarian developer Digital Reality that begins to fulfill the promise of its earlier game, Reunion.

Released here a few years back by Merit, Reunion was a flawed implementation of an idea that was then well ahead of its time: SimCity colony-building melded to space combat. It suffered from two key problems: a sense of disparate, marginally-related subgames and no real freedom of action. Reunion was punctuated with technological bottlenecks, and if you weren't up to the speed of the invading aliens at the appointed time, it ended very quickly.

The basic concept of IG is similar, but the execution is far more sprightly and engaging. In the beginning, you're a lowly lieutenant assigned to nurse three troubled colonies on the fringe of Garthog space. Succeed, and you'll make captain and assume responsibility for equipment production. (Fail, and the game ends rather abruptly.) Do well there, and you'll soon become commander, with attendant responsibility for research.

And so on, up to grand admiral; at that level, the game world is fully open to conquer and colonize as you please. The approach is clever: This not only allows you to learn IG in accessible pieces, but gives you something to live for other than another variation on the same old game.

Along the way, you'll build up your colonies with large, attractive structures—some devoted to public contentment, some to augmenting your revenue, some to research, and some to the common defense. You'll perform missions at the behest of your colonel and the local governors and conduct battles on space and on land using a variation on the Command & Conquer–style control system. You'll manage production and disposition of equipment. Eventually, you'll push into uncharted space.

It's quite enjoyable. All this is scripted with pleasing rendered animations for significant events. There's even a story woven into the game. (You keep having visions of a familiar room.) You can chat with crew members in the ship's bar and visit your own cabin. And you'll occasionally get messages—alternately bizarre and disquieting—from the wife and kid back home.

Happily, you're not shifted to an entirely different part of the universe with each promotion. You still have the colonies, fleets, and infrastructure you've built up in earlier scenarios, but your borders have expanded. This consistency gives the game a sense of a career rather than a bunch of separate pieces. IG is clearly the product of much good thought about what this sort of game should encompass.

Then again, its creators have let a few things elude them. The manual is a decent beginning, but critically lacking in detail. Indeed, clarity is an issue throughout IG. In the first scenario, if you call for reinforcements after the appearance of the alien fleet, you're instructed to conduct surveillance. But you'll be dismissed if you fail to attack the aliens. Huh?

Multiplay would have been a natural inclusion here, but it isn't addressed at all. Also, the game sometimes appears to cheat: Radar and an orbiting garrison fleet offer no hedge against invasion; an attack fleet simply shows up in planet orbit and lands its tanks. Translation issues also crop up: The audio clips attached to the video messages—particularly SOSes from ships under attack—seem to have been extracted from a Godzilla movie. They're often laugh-out-loud funny...and IG isn't a laugh-out-loud game. It's a creative and respectable game of conquest and resource management that's still a few steps shy of greatness.

A well-developed IG colony.

Deep in the game, this player has encountered a range of alien races.

IMPERIUM GALACTICA

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B

B OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

This empire's worth leading.

DEVELOPER:	Digital Reality
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive 800-621-4847
WEB:	www.gtinteractive.com
PLATFORM:	DOS CD/runs under Win 95
REQUIRES:	486DX4/100, 8MB RAM, 65MB HD, VESA 1.2–compatible 1MB SVGA, 4X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ If you feel overmatched at the lower command levels, it's probably your own fault for aiming too high. ▼ By and large, you should play defensively, take guidance from the colonel, and focus on the well-being of your colonies.

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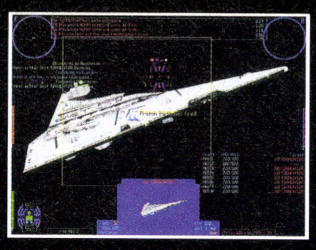
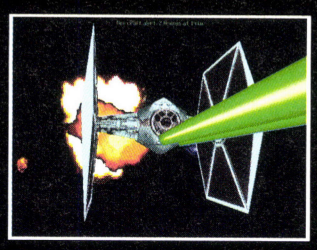
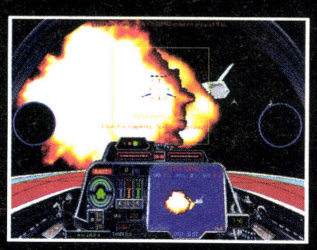
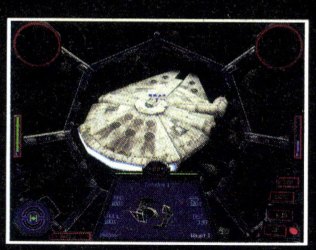
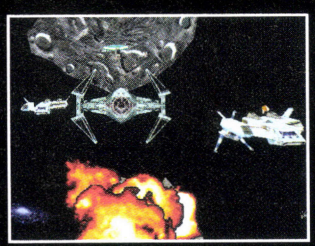
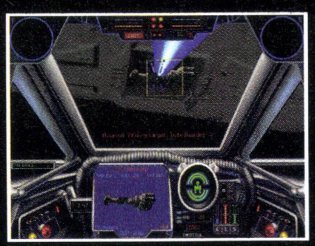
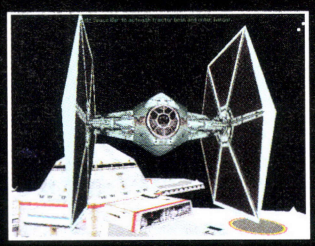





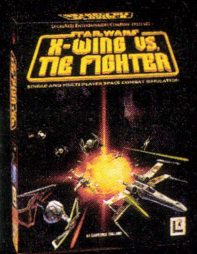
(Floyd from Accounting.)

engine is phenomenal. The new missions are masterstrokes of space mayhem. There's even single player campaigns for an all-new explosive experience. No wonder *Computer Gaming World* proclaims **X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter** "number one on every space sim-er's wish list." And if you don't believe them, just ask Floyd. http://www.lucasarts.com









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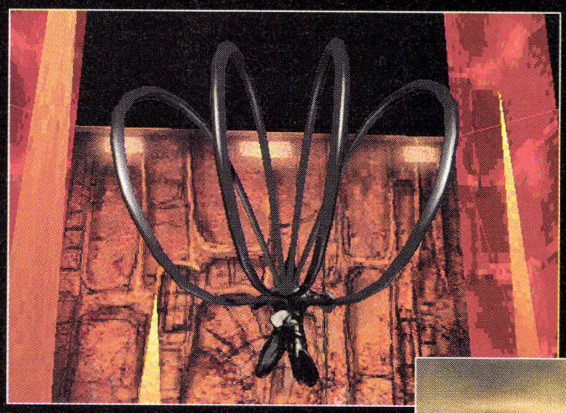

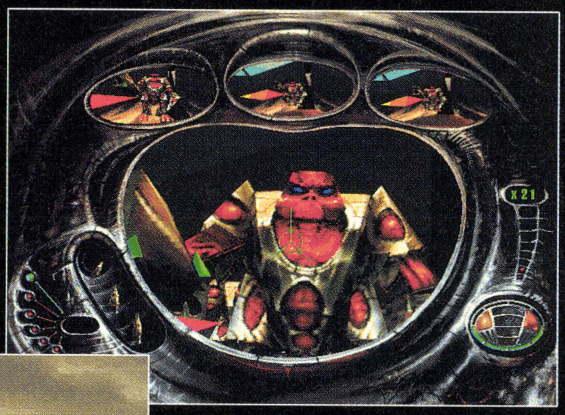

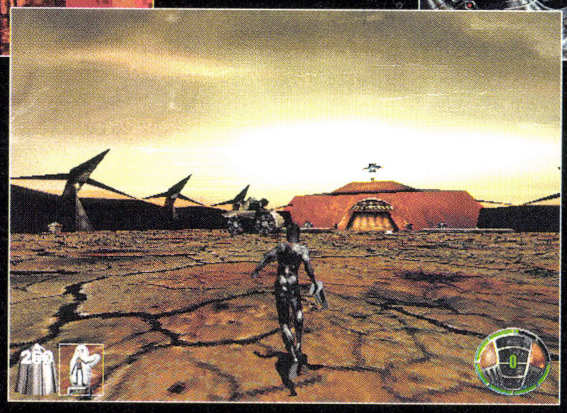

"MDK promises 3-D technology so cool and action so...realistic that it will send everything else running for cover."
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– PC GAMER

TEEN
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AGES 13+
ESRB

PC CD-ROM

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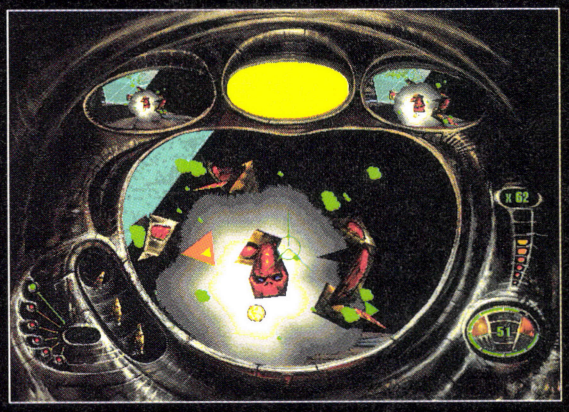

–Chosen as PC Games' May/June issue Game Of The Month

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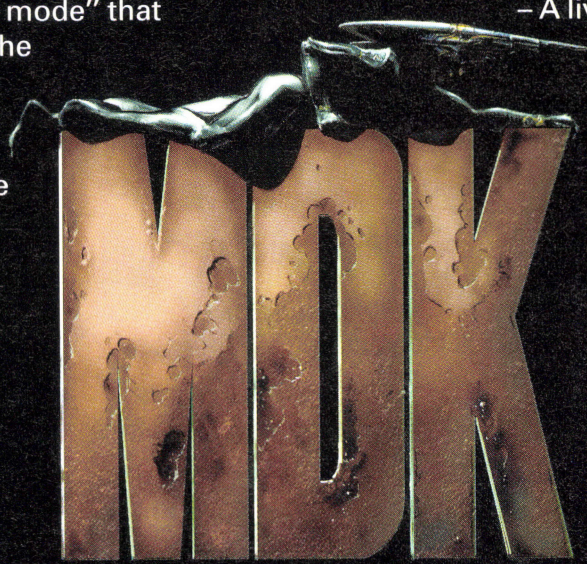

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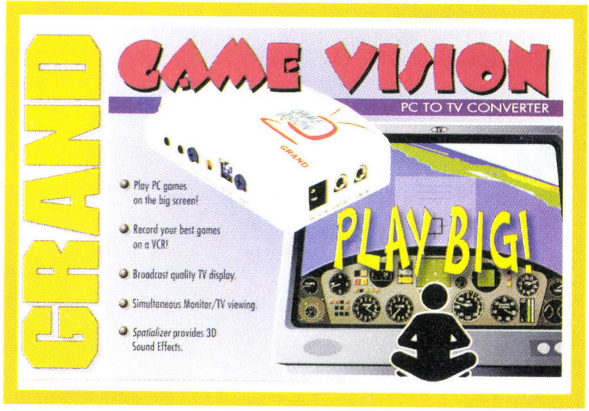

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The Last Express

There's plenty of action in this absorbing drama.

Murder on the Orient Express

Those hopping aboard The Last Express expecting a typical graphic adventure are in for an interesting ride. A combination of first- and third-person viewpoint, this game is far more than some tired tale of murder aboard that famous Paris-to-Constantinople train circa 1914. Rather, The Last Express is a compelling real-time whodunit that is both strange and yet very familiar to PC adventurers: The interface is typical but the look and presentation of the story and gameplay are decidedly different.

You're cast in the role of Robert Cath, a young American who receives a letter from his friend, Tyler Whitney, urging him to join Whitney aboard the Orient Express. After a spot of motorcycle derring-do, you arrive at Whitney's compartment to find him dead. Once you manage to callously dispose of the body by tossing it out of the window (you don't want to be accused of murder, do you?), you don blood-free duds and head out to find the killer.

The animation is a combination of stills that slowly bleed one into the next, with some occasional real-time animation, such as people walking toward you down the narrow corridors. The investigation spans four train cars and three CDs, giving you plenty of opportunities to admire the turn-of-the-century graphics and talk to prospective suspects (who serve up some generally decent voice-acting backed by solid audio). Though there are no puzzles in the traditional sense, getting into everyone's compartments is key to unearthing the plot twists.

Winning some surprisingly engaging fight sequences can make a crucial difference. One of these, atop the train, adds some particularly good action to the drama.

While it may seem staid in comparison to more rambunctious adventures like Full Throttle or The Neverhood, the game's unfolding story and twists make it an excellent change of pace in a tired genre. *—Shane Mooney*

THE LAST EXPRESS

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B-

B+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Mystery and adventure fans, climb aboard.

PUBLISHER:	Broderbund 800-548-1798
WEB:	www.broderbund.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 6.0/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX/66 (DOS)/P60 (Win 95), 8MB RAM, 35MB HD, VLB or PCI graphics, 4X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$40

Ten Pin Alley

No shoes required

The wonders of PC multimedia have been applied to most of the major sports: basketball, auto racing, baseball, hockey, soccer—even fly fishing. So why not that bastion of middle-aged Middle America, bowling?

Hey, nice form.

Fellow pinheads, here's a sim that really goes all out to re-create the details of your favorite rec sport. Ten Pin Alley brings all the drama of the polished hardwood lanes right to your fingertips. You can choose from any of eight bowlers, each of whom has different looks, fashion sense, and bowling style. Grab your character and take your shot, determining the aim, spin, power, and release point of the roll by controlling a spinning dial with your mouse.

Ten Pin lets you play single games or enter tournaments. Up to 30 players can join in league play and up to 10 players can bowl against each other over the Net using the IPX support. You can even use handicaps and save statistics from one session to another.

The game is incredibly accurate—perhaps overly so—when it comes to the details; ASC has even taken care to simulate the way lane-dressing oil is applied to the first two-thirds of the lanes and not to the last stretch. As a match goes on, you experience the effect of the ball wearing off the dressing. Likewise, when you select the weight and composition of your ball, you need to consider the effect of these factors on the spin and power of your throw.

There are a few lighter touches as well—you might find the bowling ball landing on your head if you don't release it in time (each character has a couple of different animations). That's funny, but it doesn't fully make up for the fact that once the novelty wears off, the excess detail takes away from the fun. Still, with a few buddies and some beers, Ten Pin is a decent way to kill a few hours. *—Sam Marshall*

TEN PIN ALLEY

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	B-
SOUND CHECK:	C

B- OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: B

With Ten Pin around, who needs Rock 'n' Bowl?

DEVELOPER:	Adrenalin Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	ASC Games
WEB:	www.ascgames.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 8MB RAM, 78MB HD, DirectX support, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P100, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$40

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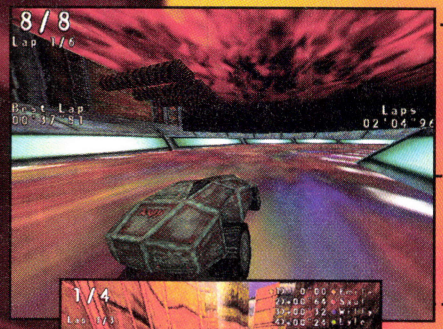

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- Computer Net Player

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- Ziff Davis Home Page

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- Happy Puppy

"Site of the day!"
- USA Today

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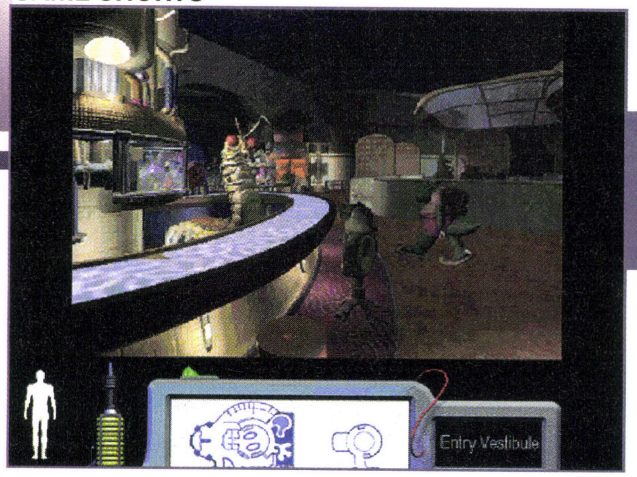
The Space Bar



The centipede bartender is the first of many oddities to greet the eyes.

There are some bars where the regulars look like they just staggered in off a run-down highway from *The Road Warrior*. Then there are bars where the regulars have just staggered in from run-down spaceports worse than Mos Eisley.

Cosmic comedy

The Space Bar, a SegaSoft release from the ill-fated Rocket Science commune, is a cosmic comedy that casts you as a detective "investigating some malfeasance" at a watering hole for all manner of alien beings, located in orbit around the planet Armpit IV. No sooner have you entered the bar than your extraterrestrial partner is kidnapped and you have to add saving him to the chore of catching the killer you both set out after.

The main setup is that six of the bar's patrons and employees have a big problem that they need solved—and if you can handle each mini-quest, you're rewarded with an important clue.

In this manner, you'll have to figure out how to help a member of an insectoid hive race perform a quick evac with a river in his way, help swing the outcome of a sporting event with some Tommy Lasorda–style referee abuse, and discover how gambling droids cheat at a rigged slot game.

While the art and aliens are eye-catching, the gameplay tends to thin out in spots. Many of the mini-quests stretch far too long, as might be expected from a game that relies on "games within the game." The final result leaves you with a surprisingly shallow main story.

With some visual flair, wickedly funny moments, and very good voice actors who deliver some hilarious dialogue, The Space Bar is entertaining for awhile. But in the end, it's not a very filling game at all.

—Daniel Morris

SPACE BAR

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Quirky but uninspired.

DEVELOPER:	Rocket Science Games
PUBLISHER:	SegaSoft 888-734-2763
WEB:	www.segasoft.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, 16-bit video, 4X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P90
STREET PRICE:	$48

Versailles 1685

In an industry where most releases are carbon copies of past successes, a change of pace is welcome indeed. Versailles isn't a standout adventure, but its unique aspects and attention to detail merit applause.

The game is set in the sumptuous court of Louis XIV, and uses for its background the intrigue and power politics of pre-revolutionary French government. Sound like a thrilling plot for a computer game? Well, it's not exactly Duke Nukem, but it is a decidedly different experience.

Cryo Interactive went all out to make this an accurate and involving re-creation of the king's palace and society. The chief curator of the palace's historical museum provided the designers with detailed sketches of the court's real historical inhabitants, including physical features and personality traits. These larger-than-life figures are the people you'll deal with in your quest to save the king from treachery.

The plot is set into motion by a grim, poetic letter forecasting his doom. As Bontemps, his loyal valet and confidante, you are the only person with the king's trust. The game is played throughout the immense stretches of the opulent palace as you interview courtiers and gather clues to uncover the conspiracy to assassinate Louis. There are a number of low-intensity puzzles, like figuring out strongbox combinations and solving a map maze, culminating in a race to defuse a bomb.

Life was rough in them old French villages...

By far the coolest thing about Versailles is its 360-degree first-person viewpoint, with sweeping 3D-rendered graphics. It allows you to swirl around panoramically in each location, looking up and down and everywhere, soaking in the full grandeur of the awesomely re-created palace.

God save the king... with a little help from his trusty valet

Unfortunately, at the end of the day, it's more a historical CD-ROM (yikes!) than a mystery game. If you're up for a meticulous restoration of Louis' court and courtiers, Versailles holds hours of fascinating material. If you're not, it won't hold your interest for long.

—Daniel Morris

VERSAILLES 1685

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Intriguing setting and graphics; not much adventure.

PUBLISHER:	Cryo Interactive 800-468-3775
WEB:	www.cryo-interactive.fr
PLATFORM:	Win 95/DOS CD
REQUIRES:	486DX/66, 8MB RAM, 2MB HD, 2X CD-ROM
RECOMMENDED:	P60, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$40

Rally Championship

Make sure you read the weather reports.

After the disappointing release of Sega Rally, a big-name title, it's interesting to see a smaller product that not only does the same thing, but does it better. Based on the European rally races, Rally Championship is an arcade-style racer with plenty of realistic elements. It looks as good as Sega Rally, plays and performs better (on a P133, it's thoroughly playable in hi-res with all graphic options active), and has more options, six cars, and an impressive 30 tracks.

Take this car and drive it

It's also quite different. For one thing, your main opponent is time, not the other racers. In Championship mode, you race alone, trying to best the times of the other drivers. Arcade mode, which offers five levels of challenge and grouping of tracks, lets you race against many other cars, but the object is simply to get the best time. It doesn't even give you positions during the race.

The wildly curving tracks have distinct beginnings and endings, so you don't race laps in the game, either. The road can have a variety of surfaces, from smooth asphalt to gravel, mud, snow—even water. Also, the game has some excellent effects, including night driving and rain. On the whole, the tracks aren't as ornate or original as those in Sega Rally, but most of them are challenging and fun to race on.

Rally Championship's sound effects are very good, although the music is rather lame. The game also has a number of car-customization options, natively supports a steering wheel, and contains eight-player network support. Overall, it's a very solid racer, superior to its nearest competitor in nearly every way. While it certainly isn't the best PC racer out there—my vote for that honor is NASCAR 2—it definitely provides fast-paced driving fun.

—Jason D'Aprile

Snow chains, anyone?

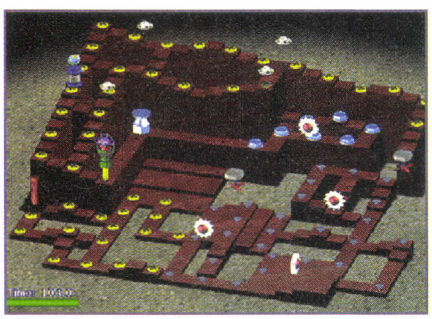
RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B-

Plenty of tracks and a well-optimized graphics engine help make this a solid rally racing game.

DEVELOPER:	Europress Software
PUBLISHER:	Virgin Interactive Entertainment 800-874-4607
WEB:	www.vie.com
PLATFORM:	DOS CD
REQUIRES:	486/66, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, 1MB SVGA
RECOMMENDED:	P100, 4X CD-ROM drive, 2MB SVGA
STREET PRICE:	$40

Gubble



A 3D variant of the classic Pac-Man, Gubble is a simple but strangely addictive little game that may end up killing more hours than you dare confess.

The alien world of Rennigar has been invaded by aliens who have, seemingly out of sheer boredom, screwed, nailed, and riveted all the levels of the planet. You (a strange blue creature with big eyes and huge ears) have been wrongly alien-napped by the inhabitants of Rennigar, who are convinced you're the chosen one who will save them.

Kiddie call

On each level, your job is to jump on the power tools (screwdrivers, hammers, etc.) that have been provided and undo all the screws, nails, nuts, and bolts in the 3D environment. All the while, enemies such as gears and robots try to stop you (a la those famous ghosts). Definitely a game aimed at the younger audience, Gubble certainly has some charm, and 150 mazes offer plenty of replay value. But it would be more appealing at a budget price. *—Rob Smith*

PUBLISHER:	Actual Entertainment 888-228-8251
WEB:	www.actualentertainment.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE:	$30
OVERALL	C+

The Divide: Enemies Within

3D mediocrity

Next to some of the graphic marvels we've been treated to in recent times, The Divide looks pretty bad. But while this side-scroller offers none of the panache of many of its contemporaries, those less intent on pushing their Pentiums to the limit may find it a pleasant distraction.

In Divide, you guide a robot alien through the bowels of a hostile planet, looking for his kidnapped partner. You must collect powerups, weapons, and other helpful items to successfully see your way through tide after vicious tide of biologically-evolved, weapon-wielding alien natives, short on looks but long on attitude.

The controls are relatively simple, though frustratingly inadequate. With only four directions, you'll constantly find yourself struggling to line up properly to get a decent shot at the enemy. This complaint aside, the game is relatively fun to play and, with a 3D card, very smooth on the eyes. *—Shane Mooney*

PUBLISHER:	Virgin Interactive Entertainment 800-874-4607
WEB:	www.vie.com
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE:	$35
OVERALL	C

3Dfx™ interactive

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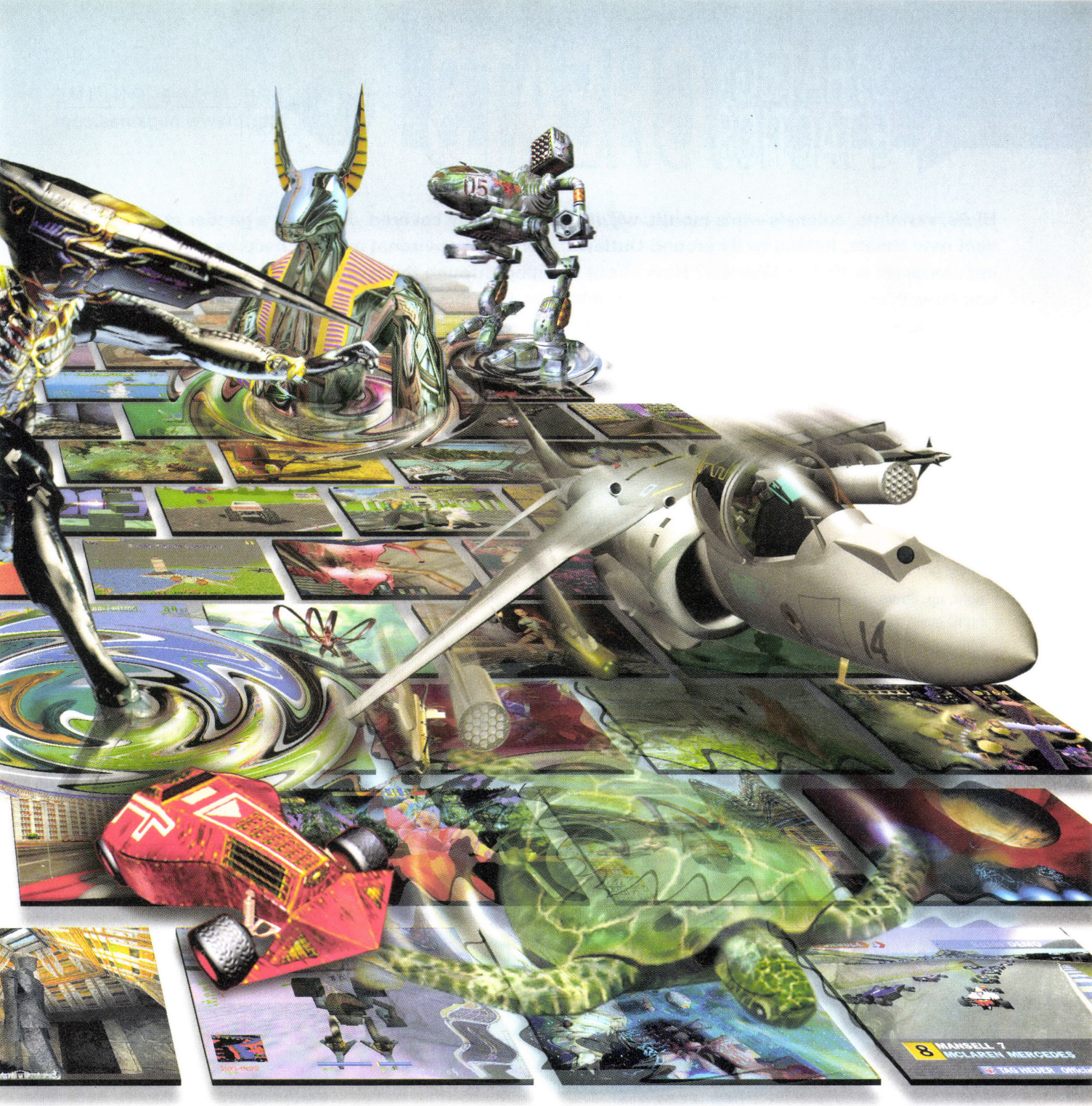

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STRATEGY & TACTICS CHEATS

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Hicks, varmints, colonels—this month, we've got *everybody* covered. Just take a gander at all these cool new cheats. Itching to fly around Outlaws' Wild West environments? Or become a whole different character in Perfect Weapon? How about skipping through the levels of Interstate '76? We'll show you how. If action's not your thing, we've got codes that'll carry you through Imperium Galactica, or grant you a secret mission in Red Alert: Counterstrike. Once again, cheaters always prosper.

Die Hard Trilogy

In any of the three subgames, push Esc to pause, then hold down the R and 2 keys. While holding them, enter the following key combos:

Die Hard 1:

right, up, down, E: god mode.

right, E, down, O: 50 grenades, smoke bombs, etc.

right, up, down, down, E, right: guns (repeat for different guns).

Die Hard 2:

right, up, down, E: guns.

right, E, left, O, A, down, E: tons of missiles and grenades.

Die Hard 3:

left, O, up, down, E, right: infinite lives.

(Note: If you've typed a code correctly, the game will unpause.)

Red Alert: Counterstrike

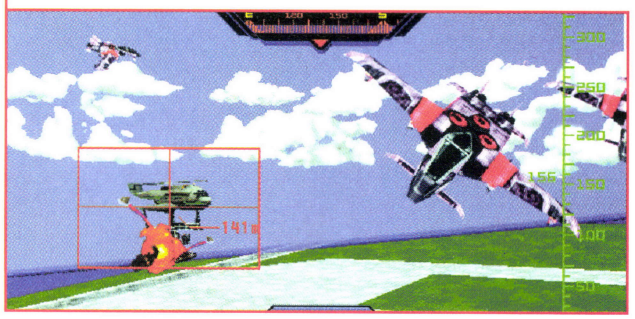
To access the secret mission, It Came From Red Alert, hold down the Shift key while clicking on the round speaker-like thing in the upper-right corner of the screen.

HeliCOPS

Type these cheats anytime during a mission (making sure you include the slash):

/ironman: makes you invincible.

/stagewin: win current mission.



Test Drive Off-Road

When asked to enter your name, type one of these:

cheat1

cheat2

cheat3

cheat4

cheat5

ciggies

You'll gain access to four more cars, all the tracks, a no-clipping mode, and an intro video.

Imperium Galactica

*While in the game hold down Shift and type **karoly** to enable the cheats. Now hit the following keys:*

c: Gain all colonies and inventions.

v: Gain 100,000 credits.

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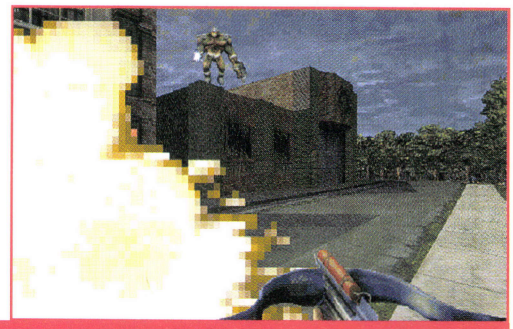


Redneck Rampage

Lick your lips, scratch your butt, then type these tasty cheats (during gameplay):

rdall: get everything (keys, ammo, health, etc.).

rdclip: toggles No Clipping mode.

rddebug: toggles Debug mode.

rdelvis: god mode.

rdmeadow#*: level warp (# is a single-digit episode number, * is a two-digit level number).

rdguns: Get all guns.

rdhounddog: message "Elvis is dead!"

rdinventory: get all inventory.

rditems: all items.

rdkeys: get all keys.

rdmoonshine: toggles XXX Moonshine mode.

rdrafael: message "For your grandpa!"

rdrate: shows frame rate.

rdshowmap: toggles Show Map.

rdskill#: change skill (# is a number from 1 to 4).

rdunlock: all locks toggled.

rdview: external view (same as F7).

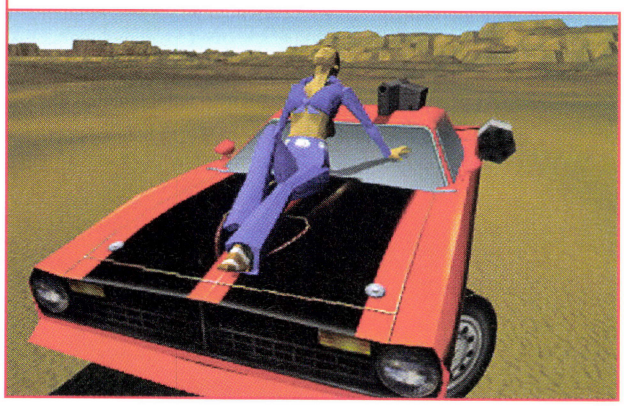
rdyerat: another Debug mode.

Interstate '76

Far out! Enter these cheats during gameplay:

During a T.R.I.P. mission, hold down Ctrl and Shift and type getdown. You'll hear Groove say these words; then you'll be attacked by all the other cars. Once they've killed you, you'll skip to the next mission.

Hold down Ctrl and Shift and type wiggleburger to blur the screen.



Perfect Weapon

We'll show you a perfect weapon: During gameplay, type the following codes, then hit the Enter key:

gmgodm: god mode.

gmbigh: big-head mode.

gmborg: change into cyber-character.

gmmove: all moves.

Level passwords:

D, B, D, B, B, A, B, A: ICE

A, D, D, C, A, A, D, C: GARDEN

A, C, B, A, B, B, C, C: FOREST

A, D, D, D, C, A, C, C: DESERT

D, D, B, D, B, B, C, A: PROTEUS

Outlaws

Type these codes during the game:

olash: unlimited ammo.

olpostal: all weapons and full ammo.

oljackpot: adds inventory.

olredlite: freezes enemies (though you can't hurt 'em while they're frozen).

olcds: full map.

olairhead: fly mode (use jump/crouch keys to move up/down).

olzip: teleport.

olfps: shows frame rate.

olgps: displays coordinates.

Level codes

(also typed during a game):

olhideout

oltown

oltrain

olcanyon

olmills

olsimms

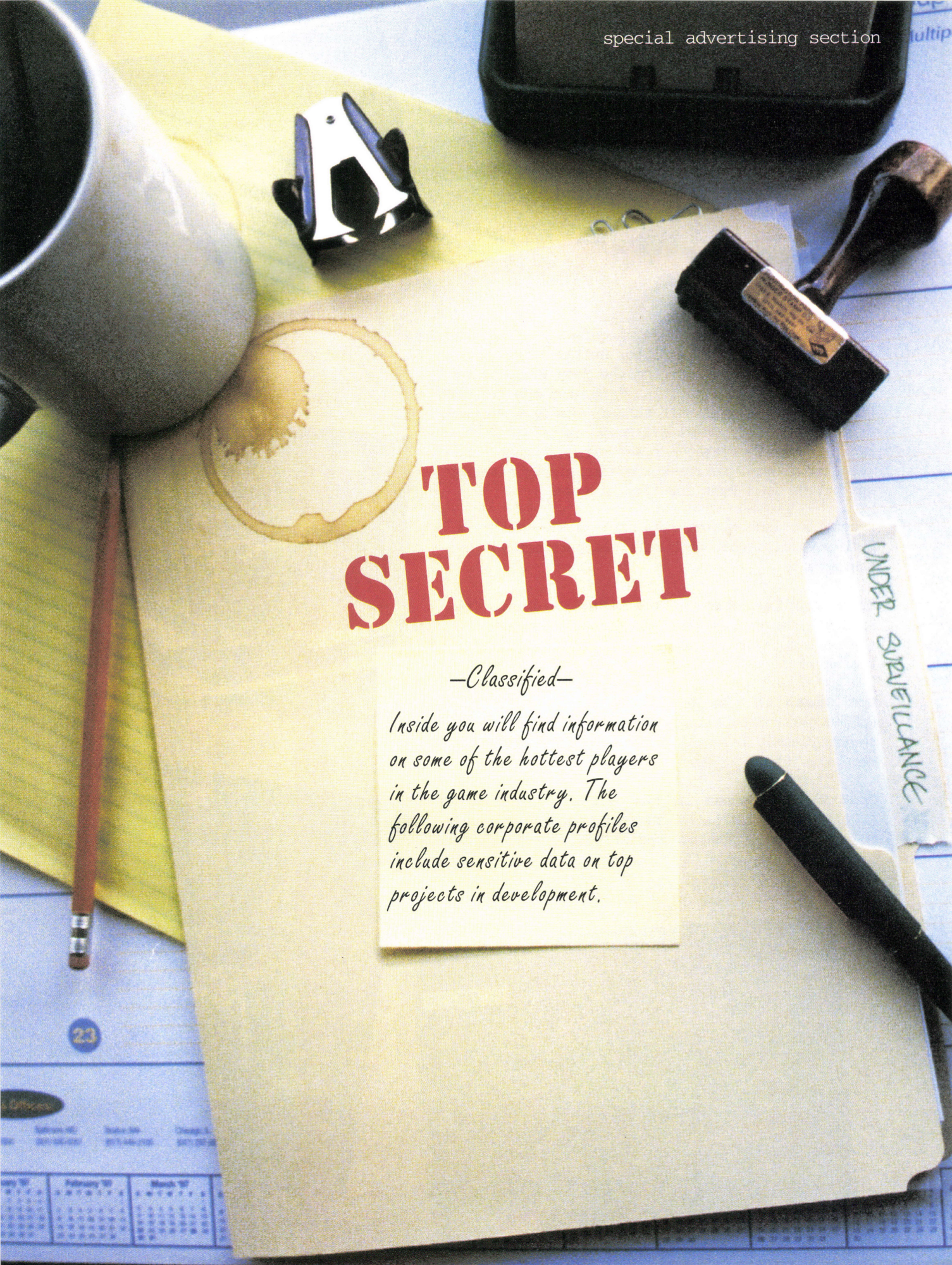
olminer

olcliff

olranch

We goofed! The Blood cheats listed in May/June 1997's Cheats page were actually for the full version of the game, not the shareware version on that issue's CD. Here are the correct Blood shareware cheats, as submitted by sharp-eyed reader Elak Swindell (who, for his trouble, will be receiving a free PC Games T-shirt):

god: god mode; **guns:** all weapons; **ammo:** full ammo; **armor:** full armor; **keys:** all keys; **health:** full health; **clip:** turns off clipping; **map:** full map, including secret areas; **burn:** set yourself on fire.


TOP
SECRET
—Classified—
Inside you will find information on some of the hottest players in the game industry. The following corporate profiles include sensitive data on top projects in development.
UNDER SURVEILLANCE

ACCOLADE

Accolade
5300 Stevens Creek Blvd., Ste. 500
San Jose, CA 95129
408-985-1700
www.accolade.com

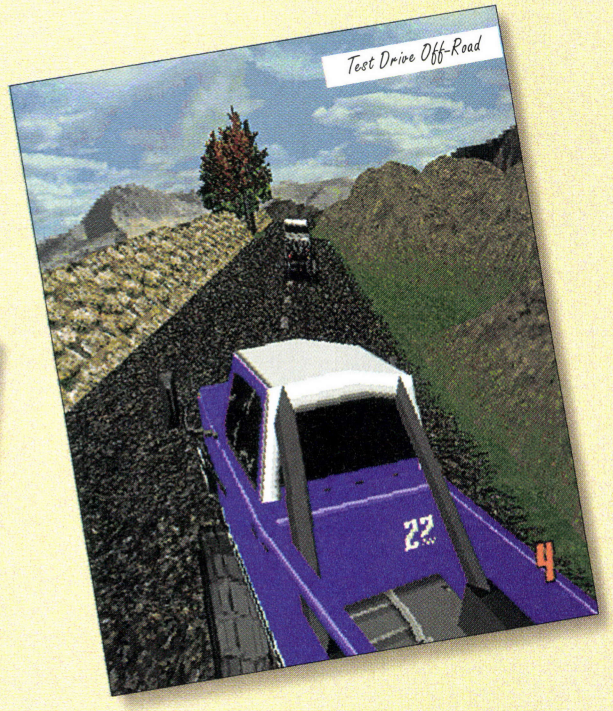
Synopsis: Founded in 1984, Accolade publishes action, sports, and strategy games for multimedia personal computers, the Internet, and the Sony PlayStation game console. Leading titles from Accolade include the long-running Hardball series; the Jack Nicklaus Golf series; Test Drive Off-Road, an off-road racing game; Deadlock, a space strategy game; and the Star Control series—space sims mixing strategy and action in a fight for the universe.

Recent Accolade titles also include Eradicator, a first-person shooter with multiple perspectives and characters.

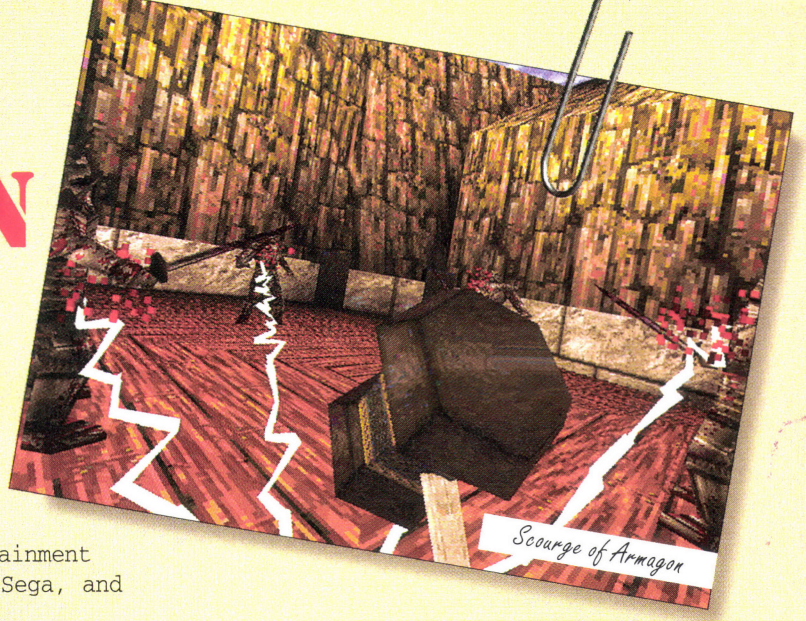
Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Hardball. The Hardball series has continued to offer some of the most popular and enduring baseball games on the market.

Hot Games in the Works: Redline, a first-person action game; Hardball 6, which brings true 3D graphics to the classic baseball series; and NFL Legends Football '98.

Online-only Games in the Works: Jack Nicklaus 4 Online, which will let players compete in online tournaments for rankings and prizes.



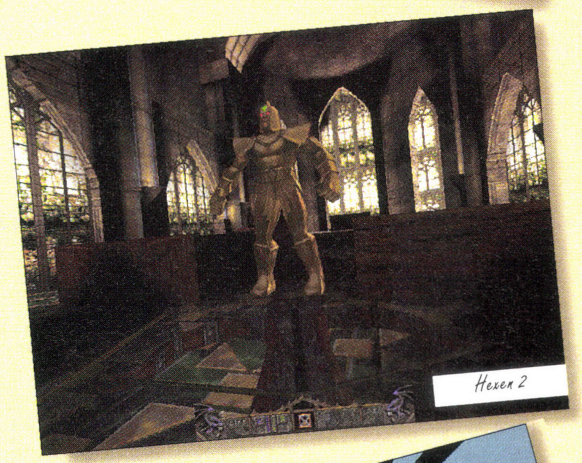
ACTIVISION



Activision
11601 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 1000
Los Angeles, CA 90025
800-477-3650
www.activision.com

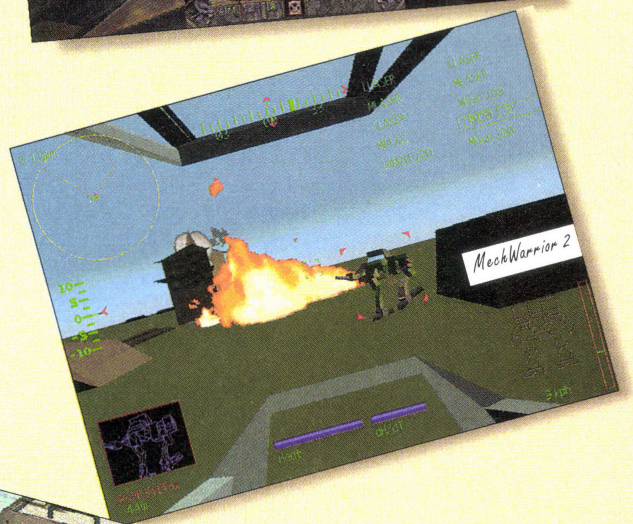
Synopsis: Activision is a publicly held developer and publisher of interactive entertainment software for computers, as well as Nintendo, Sega, and Sony PlayStation game systems.

The company's recent releases include A-10 Cuba!, HyperBlade, Interstate '76, MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries, and the Quake add-ons Scourge of Armagon and Dissolution of Eternity.

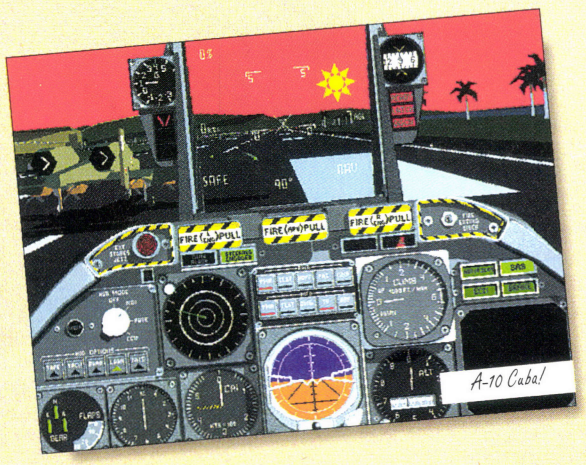


Most Popular Game(s) to Date: MechWarrior 2. This simulation of futuristic armored combat featured the BattleTech universe under license from FASA Corporation, the designers of the celebrated board game and role-playing line. The success of MechWarrior 2 ignited one of the strongest trends of the last two years, kick-starting the mechanized-combat genre.

Hot Games in the Works: Dark Reign, a space strategy game that pits opponents against one another in real-time battle; Hexen 2, an update of the classic first-person shooter; Heavy Gear, a game of futuristic armored combat; and Twinsen's Odyssey, a fantasy adventure from the design team behind Relentless: Twinsen's Adventure.



Online-only Games in the Works: NetStorm. This strategy game places you in an online struggle for control over floating islands, requiring mastery over the elemental forces of rain and wind. Its designers, who list among their credits Ultima VII and BioForge, count Command & Conquer, Archon, and Tetris among their influences.



BLUE BYTE

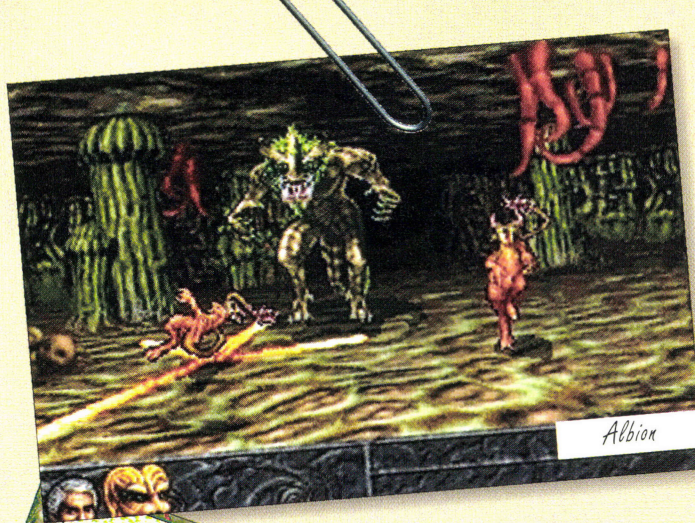
Blue Byte Software
870 E. Higgins Rd., Ste. 143
Schaumburg, IL 60173
847-995-9951
www.bluebyte.com

Synopsis: Since Blue Byte was founded in 1988 by current CEO and president Thomas Hertzler, the company has evolved into a well-known worldwide software developer and publisher. It has offices in England, Germany, and the U.S., with affiliates in France, Japan, Korea, and Spain.

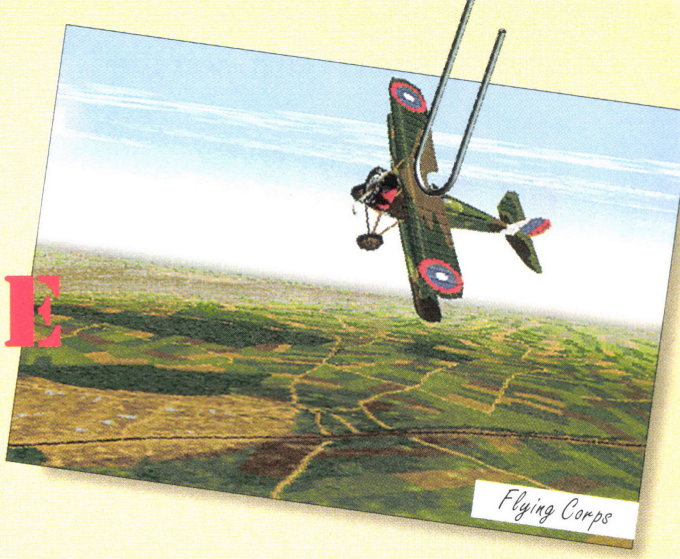
Blue Byte is committed to producing quality, original games that use the latest development and PC technology. The company's line of products includes such recent critically acclaimed titles as Albion, an RPG in which players roam a vast alien world; Settlers II, the strategy sequel to Serf City; Settlers II: Gold Edition; and Archimedean Dynasty, an undersea action adventure set in a future Earth where mankind has been driven into the oceans.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Archimedean Dynasty

Hot Games in the Works: Extreme Assault, in which players operate a high-tech attack helicopter and a state-of-the-art battle tank in a war against alien invaders. This action game will include solo-play and online-play options.

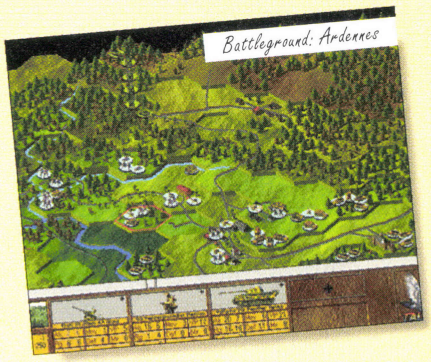


EMPIRE INTERACTIVE



Empire Interactive
13220 Wisteria Drive, Bay N-2
Germantown, MD 20874
800-216-9706
www.empire-us.com

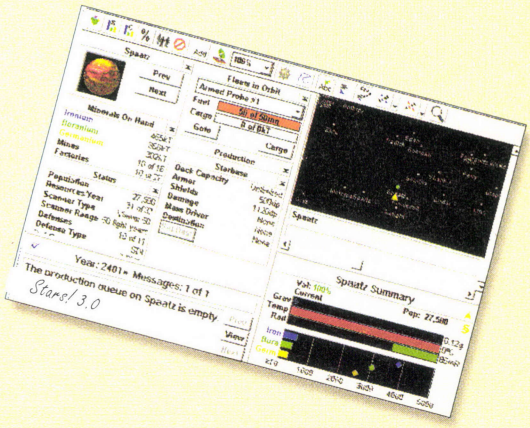
Synopsis: Established in 1985, Empire Interactive is one of the world's leading independent software publishers. With a development schedule packed full of innovative and exciting new products, Empire Interactive "is dedicated to providing only the best."



Empire's previously published titles include the WWI flight sim Dawn Patrol, the long-running Battleground series, and the strategy adventure Dreamweb. In addition, the UK-based company created one of the most realistic pinball sims ever with Pro Pinball: The Web. Its most recent release, Flying Corps, received praise not only for its detailed flight model, but also for its box content, which included a comprehensive manual and useful maps.

Forthcoming titles include the Korean War flight sim MiG Alley; Timeshock, the next entry in the Pro Pinball series; and a new take on golf sims, The Golf Pro. The latter title will incorporate a new control method that uses the mouse to simulate the swing of the club, reportedly providing a greater sensation of action and involvement than the familiar three-click "swingometer" used in most golf sims.

Empire has also entered the online-gaming world by packaging and releasing to retail the detailed space strategy/conquest sim Stars! A fully updated version featuring new graphics and user-friendly controls will be released later this year.



Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Flying Corps

Hot Games in the Works: MiG Alley, Pro Pinball: Timeshock, The Golf Pro

Online-only Games in the Works: Stars! 3.0

ENGAGE GAMES ONLINE

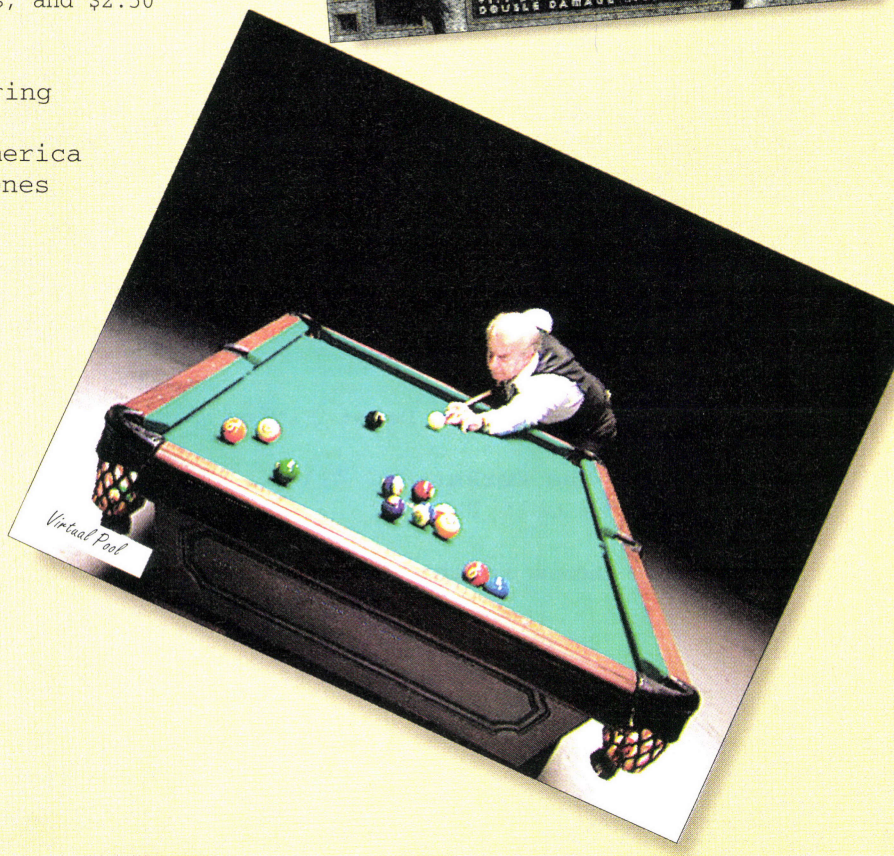
Engage Games Online
17922 Fitch Avenue
Irvine, CA 92714
714-752-5510
www.engagegames.com

Synopsis: Engage Games Online provides some of the world's most popular multiplayer games via the Internet and most major online services. Currently, its titles include Descent, Warcraft II, Rolemaster: Magestorm, Splatterball, Darkness Falls, Virtual Pool, Castles II, Billboard Live Music Trivia, and many more.

But Engage is more than just an online game service; it's a community of gamers of all levels, with standard- and low-latency access, chat rooms, bulletin boards, and a wide variety of games.

Right now, Engage offers subscribers two different hourly rates: $1.95 per hour with ads, and $2.50 per hour ad-free.

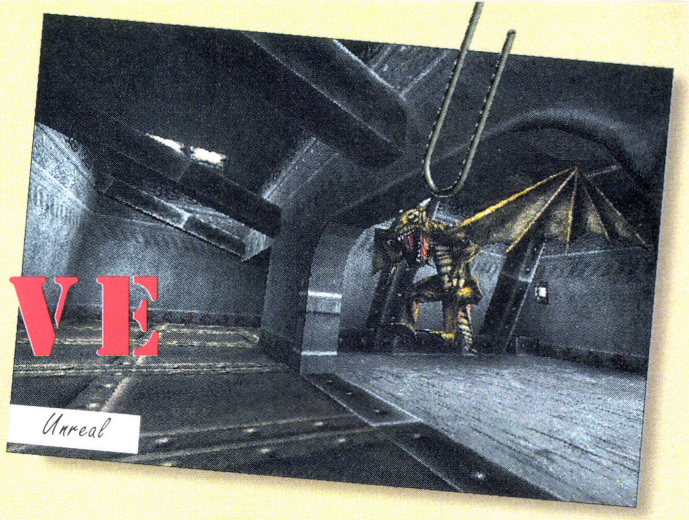
Among the online services offering access to Engage are EarthLink Network, Concentric Network, America Online, Prodigy, CompuServe, Jones Internet Channel, and Pacific Internet (Asia only).



Most Popular Game(s) to Date:
Too early to tell

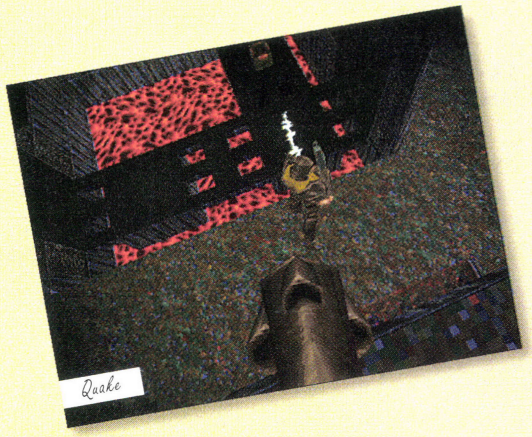
Hot Games in the Works:
Redneck Rampage, Tele-Arena, U.S. Chess Federation, Diablo, Rolemaster: The Bladelands

GT INTERACTIVE

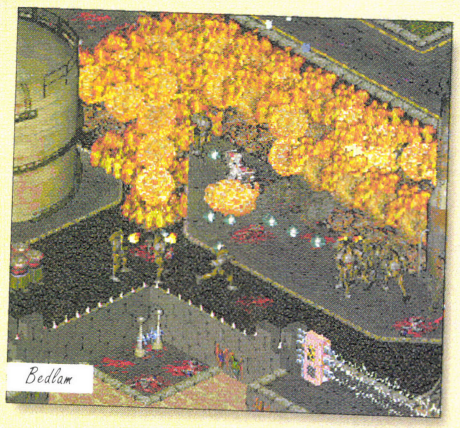


GT Interactive
16 East 40th St.
New York, NY 10016
800-621-4847
www.gtinteractive.com

Synopsis: Headquartered in New York, GT Interactive Software Corp. is a leading global publisher of entertainment and edutainment software under the GT Interactive, Humongous Entertainment, and Cavedog Entertainment brands. Together, these branches release games for PCs and console systems from Sony, Sega, and Nintendo.



Over the past year, GT has signed publishing deals with a number of big-name developers, including 3D Realms, known for its action hit Duke Nukem 3D. The company also negotiated a publishing agreement for the retail release of id Software's long-awaited Quake. These top-selling first-person action games will be joined under the GT Interactive publishing label by Epic MegaGames' upcoming Unreal.



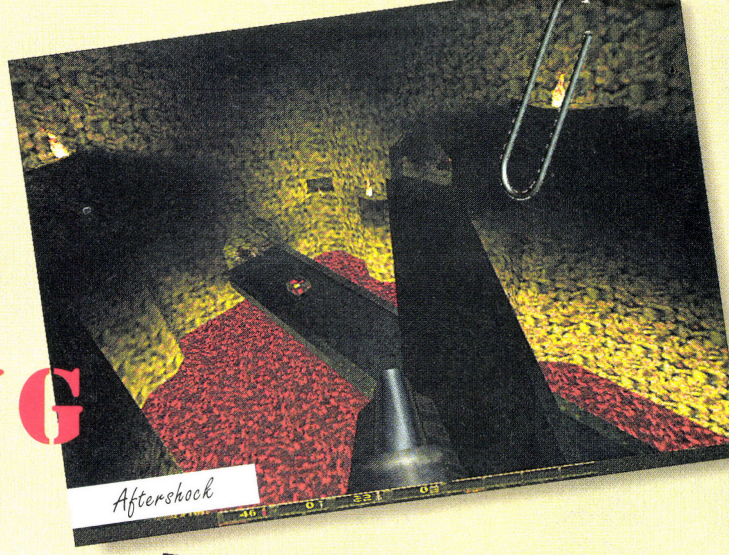
In addition, GT has published adventure games such as CyberSites' murder mystery SPQR, set in ancient Rome, and Tribeca Interactive's bizarre, surrealistic adventure 9. On the strategy front, GT recently released Imperium Galactica, a space-strategy game developed by Digital Reality.

Other retail releases include the full boxed version of Apogee's shareware arcade racer Death Rally, as well as the action game TigerShark.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date:
Duke Nukem 3D, Quake

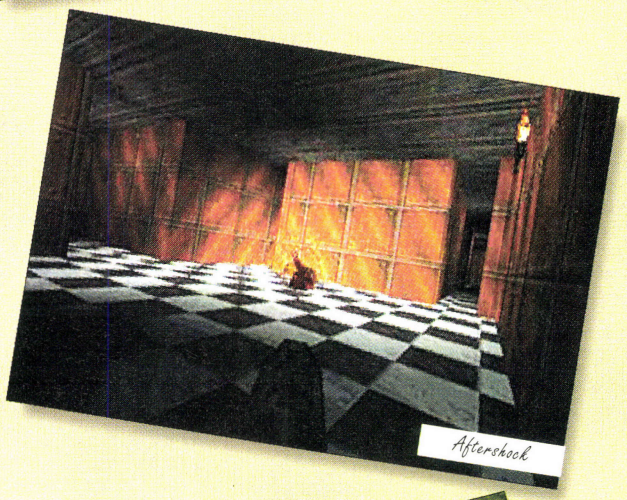
Hot Games in the Works: Oddworld: Abe's Odyssee, Unreal, Shadow Warrior, Blood, Total Annihilation

HEAD GAMES PUBLISHING



Head Games Publishing
800 Transfer Rd.
St. Paul, MN 55114
612-321-9470
www.headgames.net

Synopsis: Head Games Publishing was formed in August 1996 to develop and market CD-ROM software for the PC, emphasizing entertainment but including education, special utilities, and e-mail. Its opening titles have focused on providing add-ons and utilities for some of the most popular games of the moment.



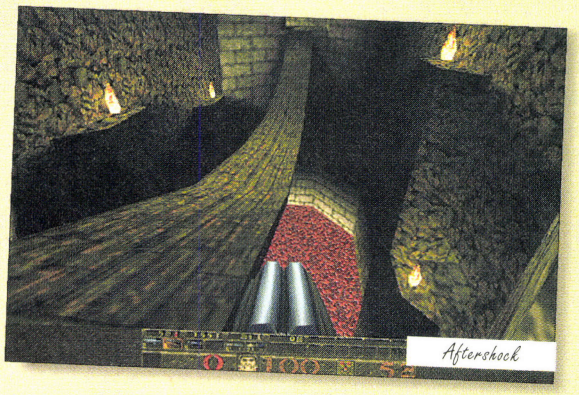
Heading this list is Aftershock, a Quake add-on pack that includes a new episode as well as six new multiplayer levels. Where many of the retail Quake level packs have focused on quantity, Aftershock's success has shown how putting careful thought into the design process can pay off with the consumer.

Further Head Games titles include Tremor, a large collection of Quake levels, add-ons, and utilities, and Top Speed, which offers NASCAR, IndyCar, and Grand Prix games owners new truck and car templates, new tire compounds, and 28 new tracks.

Head Games has also picked up the publishing rights to Windward Studios' Enemy Nations, a real-time strategy game in which players struggle for control of an alien world.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Aftershock

Hot Games in the Works: Brunswick Pro Pool 3D, Grant Hill Fantasy Basketball, Terry Bradshaw Fantasy Football, Cal Ripken Jr. Fantasy Baseball



INTERPLAY PRODUCTIONS

Interplay Productions
16815 Von Karman Ave.
Irvine, CA 92606
800-468-3775
www.interplay.com

Synopsis: Interplay has a long history in computer gaming. In addition to maintaining a large in-house design team, the company is an influential publisher of titles developed by independent design houses, including Parallax's Descent series.

Interplay has also made a name for itself by producing games based on popular licenses, including the original *Star Trek* television series. The company's U.S. operations are joined by an extensive overseas distribution arm that is releasing such popular games as MDK.

Recent Interplay titles have included M.A.X., Realms of the Haunting, Redneck Rampage, and Shattered Steel.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Descent and Descent II are still Interplay's best-selling games. They have evolved from their original PC versions and have been enhanced for 3D accelerators, as well as ported to the Macintosh and the Sony PlayStation.

Hot Games in the Works: The latest in Interplay's line of *Star Trek* games, Starfleet Academy; Wild 9, a 32-bit console game promising "never-before-seen lighting and weapon effects"; and Of Light & Darkness, "the most psychically evocative and technically masterful interactive achievement of the seventh millennium."

Online-only Games in the Works: Special online versions of Redneck Rampage, Descent, and Virtual Pool (available via Engage Games Online).

LUCASARTS

LucasArts
P.O. Box 10307
San Rafael, CA 94912
415-472-3400
www.lucasarts.com

Synopsis: LucasArts is the interactive production arm of George Lucas' entertainment empire. Based in Marin County, Calif., the company develops and publishes entertainment and educational software for a variety of computer and console platforms. Its games have included the hits Full Throttle, The Curse of Monkey Island 1 and 2, Dark Forces, Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis, Rebel Assault I and II, X-Wing, and TIE Fighter.

Recent releases include Outlaws, a first-person shooter set in the mythical Old West, and X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter, a combination of the earlier space sims that lets players fly against each other as Rebel pilots or Imperial soldiers.

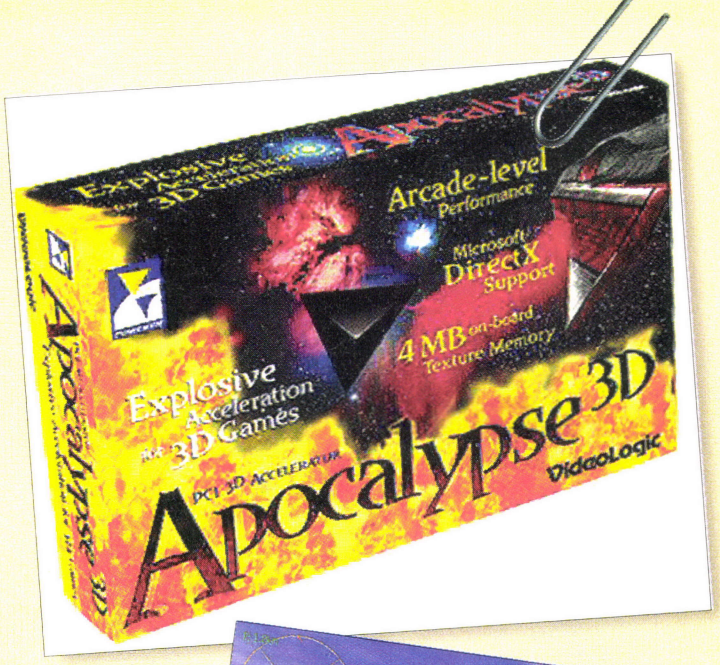
Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Dark Forces. Largely considered to be one of the best of the early first-person shooters, Dark Forces offered gamers the *Star Wars* universe from a new perspective.

Hot Games in the Works: Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II updates the *Star Wars* entry into the first-person action genre, providing a true 3D environment. Rebellion is a grand strategy game pitting the Rebels against the Empire for control of the galaxy; the major *Star Wars* characters appear as heroes in the game, and their capture can turn the tide of the war for either side. Also planned is a PC version of the successful Nintendo 64 cart Shadows of the Empire.

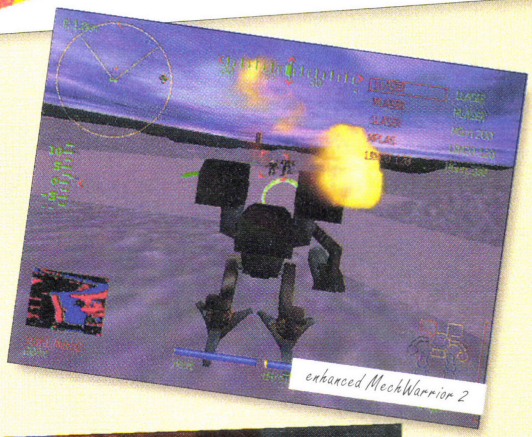
NEC

NEC Electronics Inc.
475 Ellis St.
P.O. Box 7241
Mountain View, CA 94039-7241
415-960-6000
www.powervr.com

Synopsis: NEC, in conjunction with VideoLogic, has developed the PowerVR 3D graphics architecture, providing leading 3D performance for PC enthusiasts. With third-party support growing every day, PowerVR has the potential to become a major player in the 3D market.



Most Popular Product(s) to Date: PowerVR chipset used in the Apocalypse 3D graphics accelerator (which comes bundled with Kalisto's Ultimate Race and an enhanced version of MechWarrior 2). PowerVR delivers high-quality 3D graphics for the next generation of interactive entertainment. Its cutting-edge technology provides real-time 3D rendering and competitive price/performance for companies developing 3D systems for consoles, PCs or arcade systems.



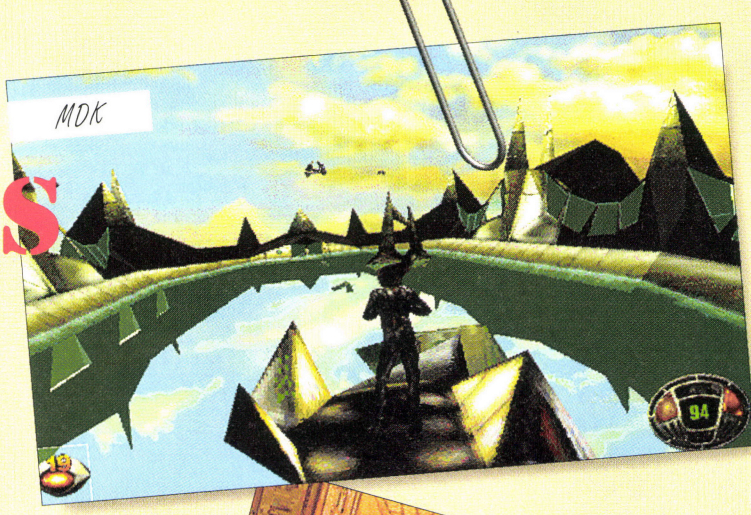
The PowerVR design team has drawn on years of experience in flight simulators, ray tracing, and other advanced 3D fields to produce a system that eliminates expensive memory and bandwidth bottlenecks to deliver leading graphic realism, with great detail and high frame rates. VideoLogic and NEC's patented PowerVR system is fully scaleable, so it can be used in a wide range of 3D applications and entertainment markets from game consoles and PCs, right up to high-end arcade machines, allowing content producers to target a range of different platforms without redesigning their titles.

PowerVR's polygon-object rendering allows the use of conventional, industry-standard APIs such as Microsoft's Direct3. The ability to directly process infinite planes and convex objects also allows PowerVR to provide advanced features such as full shadows and searchlights in real time. In addition to support for industry-standard APIs, PowerVR has its own high-level, multi-platform, object-oriented API, PowerVR SGL, which provides full access to all the capabilities of the PowerVR hardware.

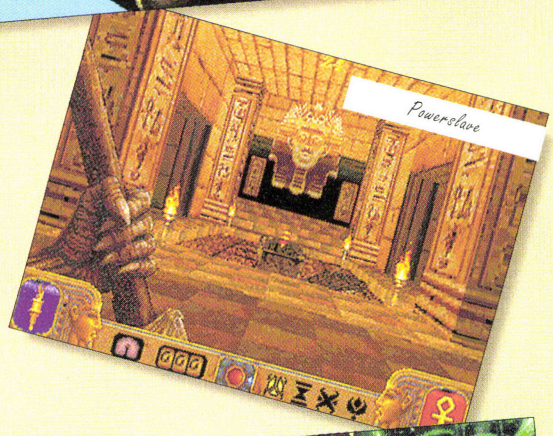
Hot Products in the Works: PowerVR-enabled versions of WipeOut XL and MechWarrior 3.

PLAYMATES

Playmates Interactive Entertainment
611 Anton Blvd., Suite 500
Costa Mesa, CA 92626
714-428-2251
www.playmatestoys.com



Synopsis: Playmates Interactive Entertainment publishes games for the PC, PlayStation, and Saturn platforms. A subsidiary of Playmates Toys Holdings Ltd., best known for the megapopular Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles action figures, PIE got off to a prosperous start by producing the well-known platform games Earthworm Jim 1 and 2.

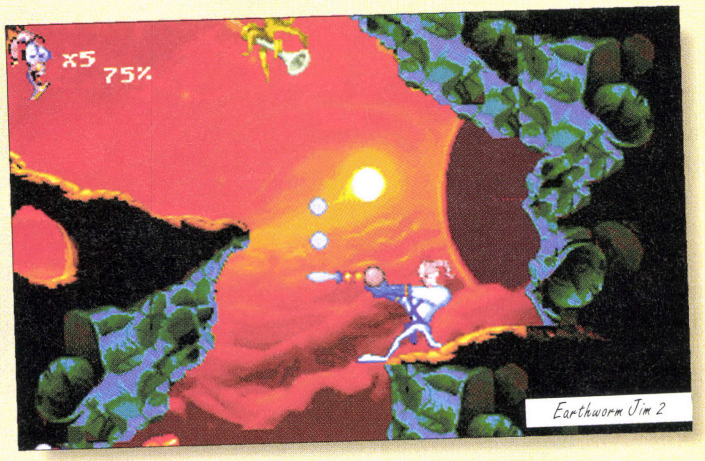


Playmates' PC games publishing history has seen the company pick up the rights to some promising titles, most notably Shiny Entertainment's action game MDK. Meanwhile, the Playmates' toy-producing side has taken Shiny's Earthworm Jim character to TV cartoon and toy prominence. Forthcoming publishing deals include the rights to a game based on the outrageous *Duckman* cartoon.

These titles come on the back of Powerslave, a first-person shooter with an Egyptian theme. The beat-'em-up genre has enjoyed limited success on the PC platform, but Playmates' port of the PlayStation title Battle Arena Toshinden proved that the PC could offer arcade-style speed and quality.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: MDK, Earthworm Jim 1 & 2: The Whole Can O' Worms

Hot Games in the Works: Meat Puppet, Duckman, Vengeance



PSYGNOSIS

Psygnosis
919 E. Hillsdale Blvd.
Foster City, CA 94404
800-438-7794
www.psygnosis.com

Synopsis: Since 1984, when it was founded in Liverpool, England, Psygnosis has sought distinction from other PC entertainment software companies by delivering interactive game experiences unlike any other. Now the largest development house in Europe, Psygnosis has created more than 100 award-winning titles.

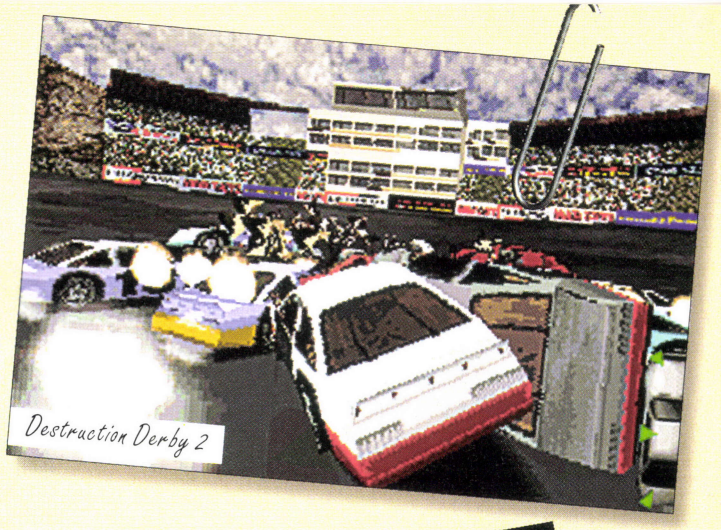
In its long history of game development, Psygnosis has released the popular Lemmings series on multiple formats and in multiple territories. Andrew Spencer Studios also developed for release under the Psygnosis banner the critically acclaimed Ecstatica, which has been boosted by the recent release of a sequel.

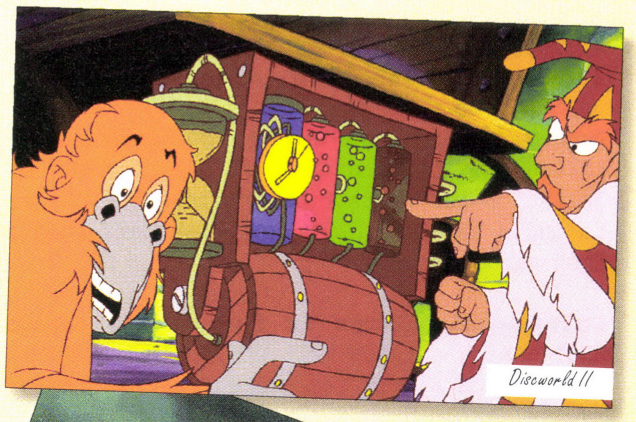
Action games have been a prominent force in the Psygnosis catalog, which has included such titles as Novastorm, Assault Rigs, Destruction Derby, WipeOut, and Krazy Ivan.

Perfect Entertainment's attempt to recreate the bizarre antics of author Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series on the PC has met with critical and commercial success in Europe, where Pratchett is a best-selling and prolific writer. Many enhancements to the game engine and the addition of more lines of dialogue from Monty Python star Eric Idle in the lead role of Rincewind have strengthened the appeal of the Discworld sequel, Mortality Bytes, for the U.S. market.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date:
Destruction Derby

Hot Games in the Works: WipeOut XL, Thunder Truck Rally, Sentient, Formula 1





SEGASOFT

SegaSoft
150 Shoreline Drive
Redwood City, CA 94065
415-802-4400
www.segasoft.com

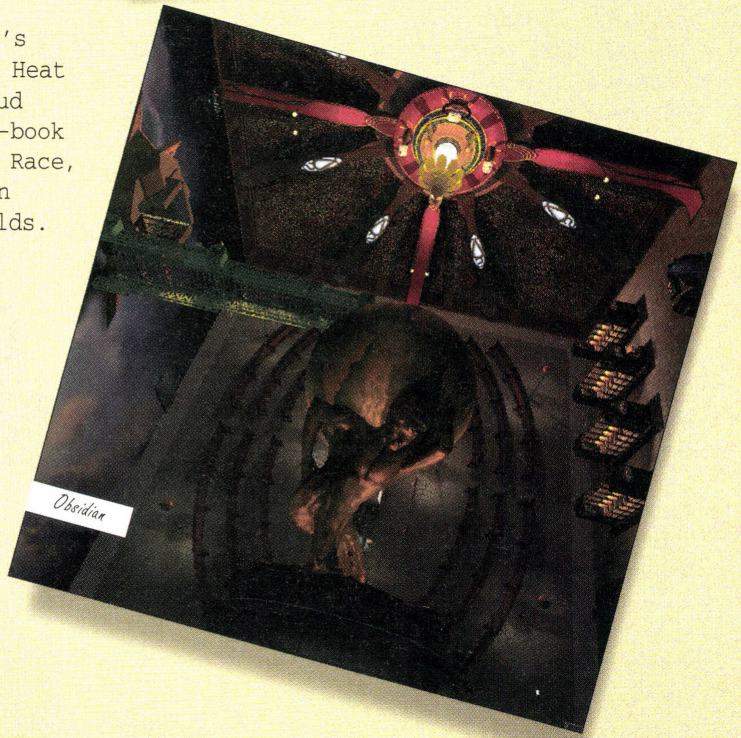
Synopsis: SegaSoft's mission is to be the definitive provider of interactive experiences for everyone who wants to be entertained or informed. Founded in 1995 as an independent U.S. incorporated software development company, SegaSoft is dedicated to creating the very best interactive software and content for delivery on all platforms, including PCs, gaming consoles, and the Internet.

Recent games include the space strategy Emperor of the Fading Suns; Rocket Jockey, an ultra-violent future sports game; and the *Star Wars* cantina-style Space Bar.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Obsidian, a graphic adventure that lures players through a series of bizarre dreamworlds.

Hot Games in the Works: Net Fighter, an online-ready game of martial-arts combat; Zombie Island, a gory horror outing in which players have to find a way off a tropic getaway infested by flesh-eating ghouls.

Online-only Games in the Works: SegaSoft's HEAT gaming service will feature games such as Heat Warz, a futuristic real-time strategy game; Scud Online, a top-down shootout based on the comic-book exploits of the Disposable Assassin; and Alien Race, in which four different species of exotic alien beasts vie for control of interdimensional worlds.



TEN

Total Entertainment Network
500 Howard St., Suite 300
San Francisco, CA 94105
415-778-3500
www.ten.net

Synopsis: The Total Entertainment Network (TEN) is an interactive entertainment service for game-playing consumers. With online rights to over 25 different titles by industry-leading game publishers—over half of which are TEN exclusives—TEN offers rankings, tournaments, hints, tips, chat, and more.

TEN has been developing Internet-gaming technologies for over six years. This innovative platform is now heralded by some developers as the best and easiest way to make their games playable on the Internet. As a result, the following publishers are currently partnering with TEN: 3D Realms, Apogee, Accolade, Blizzard, Eidos Interactive, id Software, Maxis, MicroProse, Sir-Tech, Spectrum HoloByte, SSI, and Westwood Studios.

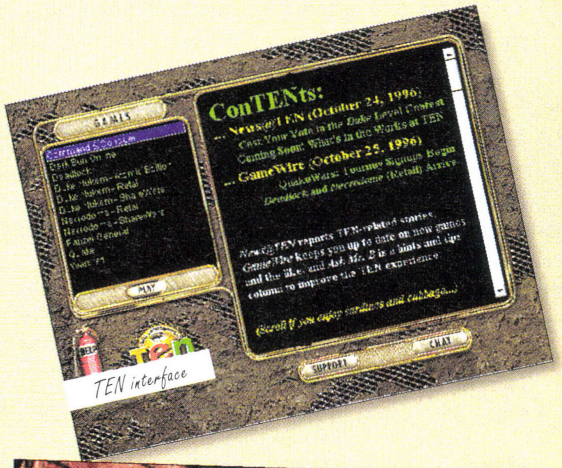
Total Entertainment Network, based in San Francisco, Calif., was formed from the merger of Outland Inc. and Planet Optigon Inc., two companies that had been developing online technologies and communities for over a decade. TEN received its initial funding in June 1995 from Kleiner Perkins Caufield and Byers. Other investors include Ameritech; The Carlyle Group; Dominion Income Management Corp.; Goldman Sachs; Robertson, Stephens & Company; and Vertex Management. Software Creations, the No. 1-rated BBS in the country, is a subsidiary of TEN.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Duke Nukem 3D, Quake, Command & Conquer, Command & Conquer: Red Alert, Dark Sun Online

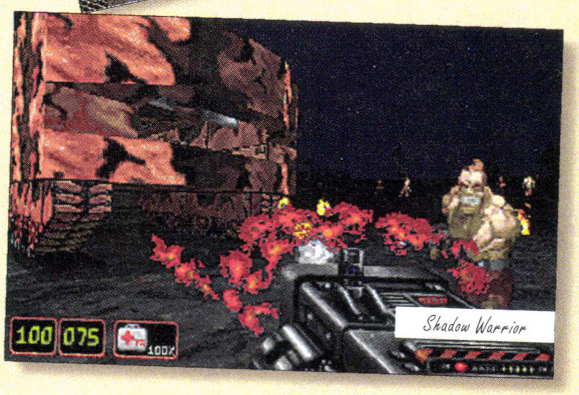
Hot Games in the Works: NASCAR Racing 2, Blood, Shadow Warrior

NASCAR Racing 2

C&C: Red Alert



TEN interface



Shadow Warrior

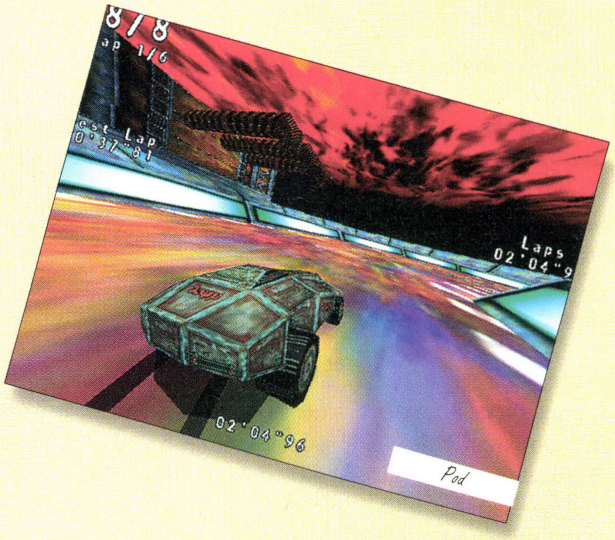
UBI SOFT

Ubi Soft Entertainment
625 3rd Street, 3rd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94107
415-547-4000
www.ubisoft.com

Synopsis: Founded in 1986 in France, Ubi Soft Entertainment is a leader in the distribution and development of games and educational software for PCs and home-entertainment systems.

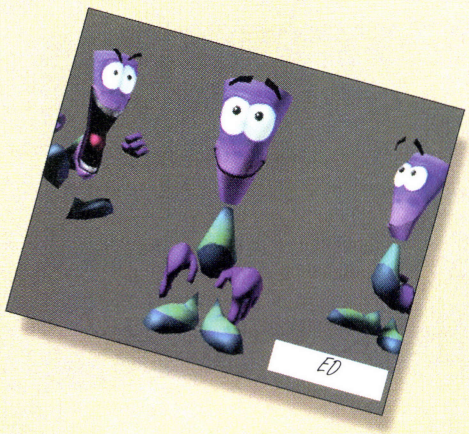
Ubi Soft is best known for the blockbuster hit Rayman, a playful, upbeat platform game that enjoyed widespread praise. More recently, the company has released Pod, one of the first games to take full advantage of MMX technology. Now also available for Pentium processors, this racing game has proved its success by preselling more than 2.7 million units worldwide within months of completion.

Recent Ubi Soft games also include Street Racer, an animated 3D road race similar to the Nintendo 64's Super Mario Karts. Among the publisher's children's titles are Amazing Learning Games with Rayman, where players must read, count, and spell their way through mindbending landscapes; Arctic Tales with Payuta and the Ice God, a magical storybook that's part adventure, part educational tool, part game; and Keyeko and the Lost Night, another interactive tale for the whole family.

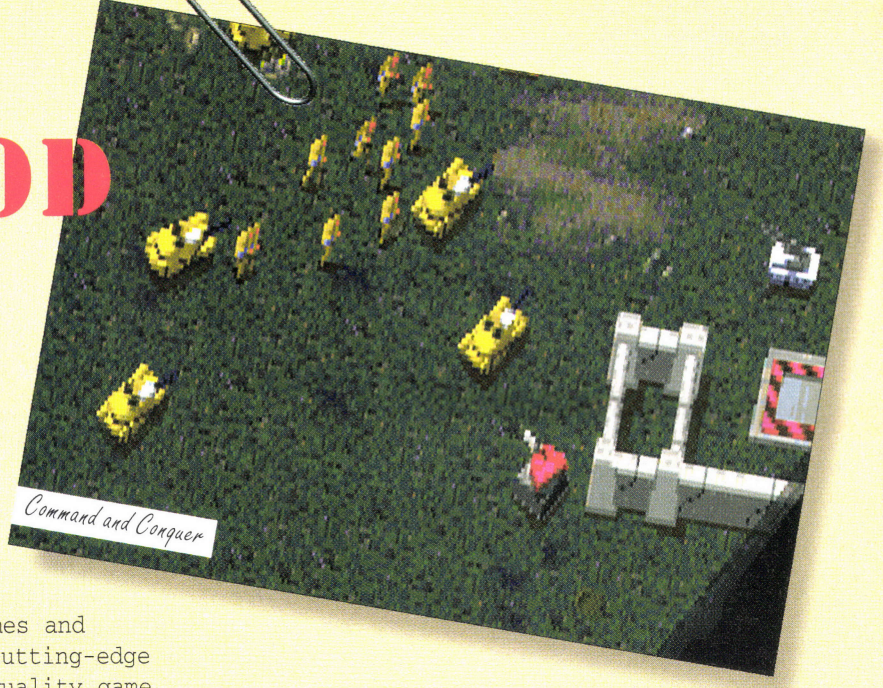


Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Rayman, Pod

Hot Games in the Works: F1 Pole Position, ED (code name)



WESTWOOD STUDIOS



Westwood Studios
2400 North Tenaya Way
Las Vegas, NV 89128-0420
702-228-4040
www.westwood.com

Synopsis: Westwood Studios is a leading developer and publisher of games and entertainment software. By combining cutting-edge technology, enchanting graphics, and quality game design, Westwood has become an established force in the world of interactive software.

Currently, the company's most popular franchise is the Command & Conquer series, which has scored hundreds of thousands of sales between the original Command & Conquer, an add-on disc (Command & Conquer: Covert Ops), and the game's highly popular sequel, Command & Conquer: Red Alert.

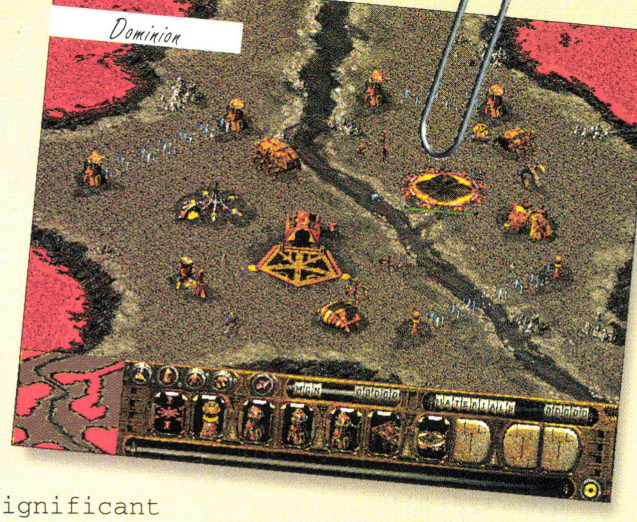
Westwood's online service, Westwood Chat, has enabled thousands of players to wage C&C battles through the Internet, and has also brought a new level of popular culture to online gaming with the online version of the perennial board-game favorite Monopoly. Also, Westwood plans a 1997 release of Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny, a modern update to the acclaimed original version of Lands of Lore.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date:
Command & Conquer: Red Alert

Hot Games in the Works: Blade Runner, Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny

Online-only Games in the Works: Command & Conquer: Sole Survivor, Games People Play: Hearts, Spades, Euchre

7TH LEVEL



7th Level
1110 E. Collins Blvd., #122
Richardson, TX 75081
800-556-0488
www.7thlevel.com

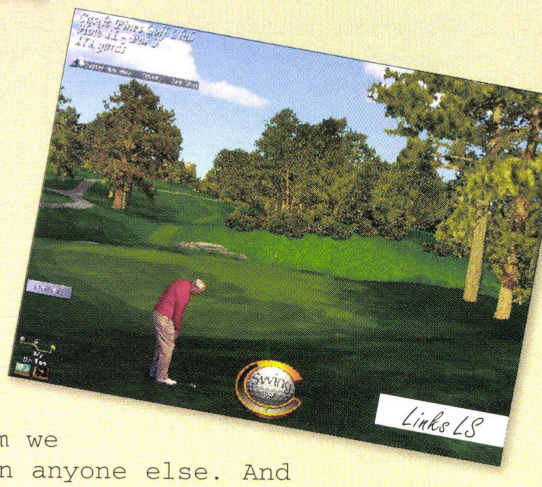
Synopsis: Best known for the offbeat humor of its early Monty Python titles and Take Your Best Shot, a game featuring the animation of Bill Plympton, 7th Level has made a significant commitment to game design in the last year.

Recent releases include the cyberspace puzzle game Tracer; Monty Python & the Quest for the Holy Grail, an outrageous adaptation of the movie; Ace Ventura, an adventure based on the wild pet detective; G-NOME, a mechanized-combat game; and the arcade-style shoot-'em-up HeliCOPS.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Monty Python's Complete Waste of Time

Hot Games in the Works: Dominion, a real-time strategy game; Return to Krondor, an RPG; Monty Python's Meaning of Life and a Best Of Python disc, both due by Christmas; and an action game called The Gatherer, due early next year.

ACCESS



Access Software
4750 Wiley Post Way
Building 1, Suite 200
Salt Lake City, UT 84116
801-359-2900
www.accesssoftware.com

Synopsis: A manufacturer of entertainment software since 1982, Access Software is dedicated to a strong corporate charter: "Whatever software platform we develop for, we will push the technology further than anyone else. And we will provide the best customer service in the business."

Access was perhaps the first software company to produce a truly interactive movie with digitized characters and speech: Under A Killing Moon. This interactive mystery featured the exploits of gumshoe Tex Murphy, played by Access president Chris Jones. UAKM was followed by the critically acclaimed Pandora Directive.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Links LS, a golf simulation that pushes the limits of realism and computer technology

Hot Games in the Works: Poisoned Pawn (working title), the next entry in the Tex Murphy mystery series. The game will debut on the new CD-ROM format DVD-ROM.

ADVANCED GRAVIS

Advanced Gravis
3140 Mercer Ave., Ste. H
Bellingham, WA 98225-8446
800-257-0661
www.gravis.com

Synopsis: Advanced Gravis, a subsidiary of Kensing Microware Ltd., is a leading manufacturer of game controllers and wavetable sound cards for the PC market. Recently, the company has been best known for its GrIP system, which lets users connect as many as four GrIP controllers to one PC for multiplayer gaming; EA's recently released EA Sports GrIP system comes bundled with Triple Play '97. Gravis products are sold in 45 countries worldwide.

Most Popular Product(s) to Date: PC Gamepad, GamePad Pro

Hot Products in the Works: Gravis plans to announce a new lineup of innovative game controllers at 1997's Electronic Entertainment Expo.

ATI TECHNOLOGIES

ATI Technologies
33 Valley Dr. East
Thornhill, Ontario, Canada
L3T 7N6
905-882-2600
www.atitech.com

Synopsis: Specializing in onboard and after-market video accelerators, ATI is the second-largest maker of 3D video boards and the third-largest shipper of 2D video boards. ATI products can be found in personal computers made by Acer, Gateway, IBM, NEC, and Sony.

Most Popular Product(s) to Date: The All-In-Wonder graphics accelerator is an affordable product that accelerates 2D and 3D video, and enables video capturing and TV tuning on a PC.

Hot Products in the Works: The third-generation 3D Rage Pro chip with built-in support for the new accelerator graphics port. Upcoming 3D Rage Pro accelerators will be fully DVD-enabled and will feature flicker-free output to conventional TVs.

special advertising section

CANOPUS

Canopus Corporation
2010 N. First Street, Ste. 510
San Jose, CA 95131-2040
888-868-2533
www.total3d.com

Synopsis: Founded in 1995, Canopus is one of the world's leading manufacturers of graphics cards for the PC. Canopus' products combine innovative hardware and software design to set new standards in performance, functionality, and reliability. The company is best known for the Total 3D video accelerator.

The Total 3D has won industry acclaim as one of the fastest 2D/3D accelerator cards available. The product combines a high-speed accelerator, stereoscopic realism, and 3D stereo sound. Several Total 3D–accelerated games are designed to work with VR glasses, which are included with the Total 3D video-card package.

Why the name Canopus? Canopus is the second brightest star in the sky, and because of this, it played an important role in the successful navigation of Voyagers 1 and 2 through the solar system.

Most Popular Product(s) to Date: Total 3D

CH PRODUCTS

CH Products
970 Park Center Drive
Vista, CA 92083
619-598-2518
www.chproducts.com

Synopsis: CH Products is one of the leading manufacturers of PC and Macintosh peripherals for avid gamers. The company's product line includes joysticks, throttles, rudder pedals, gamepads, flight yokes, gamecards, and trackballs.

A family-owned and -operated organization since 1977, CH Products makes all its peripherals in the United States, including its new Force FX force-feedback joystick and its F-16 series of programmable sticks for gamers and flight-sim fans. CH designers are veteran airplane builders and pilots whose years of experience bring gamers realistic involvement in computer gaming.

CH Products isn't just about fun and games. Its original equipment manufacturers department makes some of the best precision controllers available for video post-production equipment, medical instrumentation, and wheelchair applications. The company's joysticks were even used in the movement of the full-size dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*.

FALCON NORTHWEST

Falcon Northwest Computer Systems
263 South Bayshore Drive
Coos Bay, OR 97420
800-258-6778
www.falcon-nw.com

Synopsis: Falcon Northwest is dedicated to producing personal computers optimized for playing games. Although it has a recommended configuration known as the Mach V, the company also builds systems to order, based on equipment and peripherals specified by customers. In addition to game systems, Falcon produces machines intended for use in animation, architectural design, and desktop publishing.

Most Popular Product(s) to Date: Mach V Gaming PC

Hot Products in the Works: Constantly upgrading Mach V series as new components are released by quality vendors. If a product adds to the gaming experience, Falcon will include it as an option.

GRAPHIC SIMULATIONS

Graphic Simulations Corporation
15400 Knoll Trail #104
Dallas, TX 75248
972-386-7575
www.graphsim.com

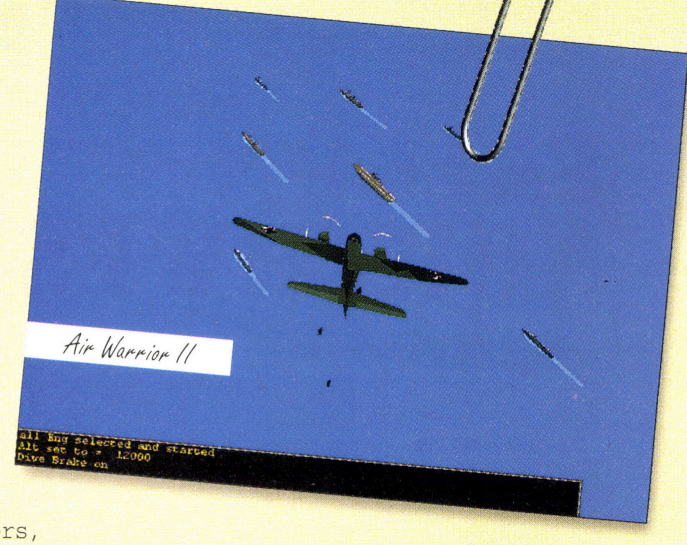
Synopsis: Graphic Simulations Corporation (GSC) designs, develops, and publishes 3D graphical simulation products for microcomputers. GSC is a leader in development and sales of flight simulators for Windows 95 and Apple Macintosh platforms.

The company's most prominent product right now is F/A-18 Hornet, a detailed sim of the naval and marine strike attack plane. It is now available in its third revision (3.0), sporting 28 missions based around the Persian Gulf. Six unique maps are also available for multiplay over a LAN with as many as four players.

GSC has also released Amber: Journeys Beyond, an *X-Files*/Myst-like adventure that takes gamers into a house teeming with the paranormal. However, the publisher's focus is primarily on the development of flight sims.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: F/A-18 Hornet

I-MAGIC



Interactive Magic/I-Magic Online
P.O. Box 13491
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709
919-461-0722
www.imagicgames.com

Synopsis: Chaired by industry veteran "Wild Bill" Stealey, Interactive Magic is dedicated to developing and publishing quality strategy and simulation games. Known most for its combat simulators, I-Magic recently acquired Interactive Creations Incorporated (ICI), the maker of Warbirds, and has formed I-Magic Online.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: I-Magic: Apache, the highly acclaimed modern helicopter combat simulator; ICI: Warbirds, which maintains a large and loyal online following.

Hot Games in the Works: I-Magic: iF-22 Raptor and iF-16 Viper, cutting-edge simulations of the hottest military aircraft, and Great Battles of Hannibal, a re-creation of warfare from the age of antiquity; I-Magic Online: Planetary Raiders, an online space simulation, and Wild Bill's Casino, an online virtual casino.

INTERGRAPH

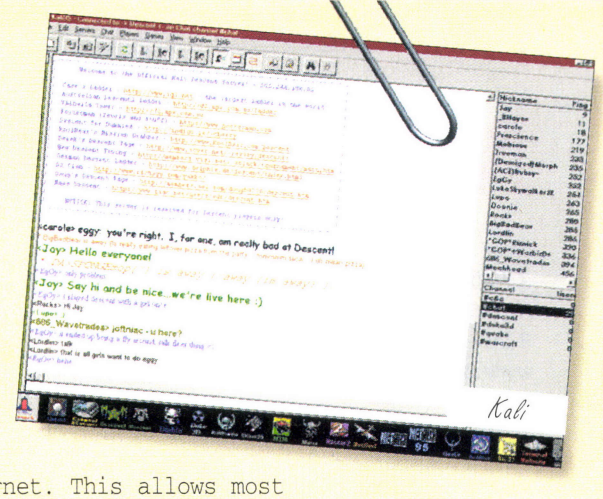
Intergraph Computer Systems
1 Madison Ind. Park
Huntsville, AL 35894
205-730-8057
www.intergraph.com/ics/i3d100

Synopsis: Intergraph is a leader in 3D graphics technology and computer systems optimized for 3D. Having built its reputation as a maker of high-end dual-processor PCs used in the creation of computer-generated animation and graphics, Intergraph has made a commitment to creating systems and equipment for consumers, including 3D video accelerator cards.

Most Popular Product(s) to Date: Intense 3D 100 Rendition Ready graphics accelerator, an all-in-one video card with excellent 2D performance and 3D support for some of the most popular games on the market.

Hot Products in the Works: Intergraph is currently working on a faster 3D game accelerator for consumers.

KALI



Kali
P.O. Box 6916
Athens, GA 30604
800-965-5254
www.kali.net

Synopsis: Kali is the invention of Jay Cotton, who made Internet gaming a reality in 1995 with software that mimics the functions of an IPX network over the Internet. This allows most games that support IPX networks—such as Command & Conquer and Duke Nukem 3D—to be played online.

Over 100,000 subscribers have paid the one-time fee of $20 to register for full access to Kali, making it one of the most popular online-gaming services. A simple front-end chat interface allows gamers to meet and then move off the Kali server to host their own games.

Kali's broad range of potential games has meant that most recent big-name multiplayer games are supported on the network. These include action hits like Quake, racers such as Big Red Racing, MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries, Diablo, Master of Orion II, and Warcraft II. The Kali philosophy is to supply the software that will allow all forthcoming multiplayer games to be playable over the system.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Not applicable

LOOKING GLASS

Looking Glass Technologies
100 Cambridge Park Drive, Ste. 300
Cambridge, MA 02140
800-360-7455
www.lglass.com

Synopsis: Founded in 1992, Looking Glass is a leading developer of interactive entertainment and simulation software titles for CD-ROM-based PC systems. The company was formed through a merger of Blue Sky Productions and Lerner Research, who, together, produced such hit titles as Chuck Yeager's Flight Trainer series, F22 Interceptor, John Madden Football '93, Ultima Underworld I and II, and System Shock.

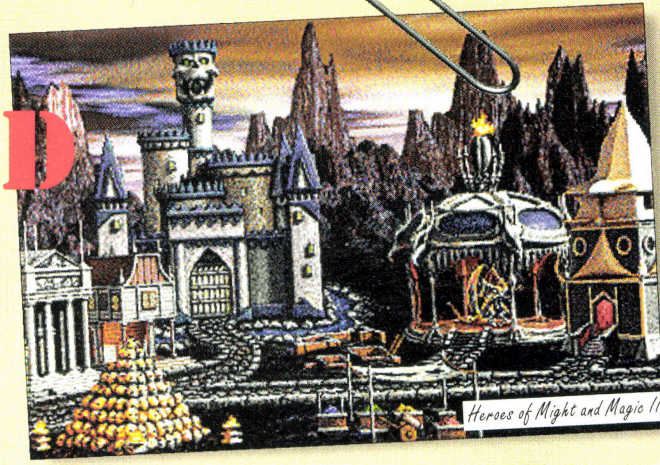
Since emerging as a publisher in May 1995, Looking Glass has released several notable games, including Flight Unlimited, a popular flight sim, and Terra Nova, a heated team-combat sim.

Among the company's goals: "Immersive Reality: a gaming experience that achieves the elusive suspension of disbelief by putting players in a totally realistic game world."

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Flight Unlimited

Hot Games in the Works: British Open Championship Golf, Flight Unlimited II, The Dark Project (working title)

NEW WORLD



New World Computing
29800 Agoura Rd. #200
Agoura Hills, CA 91301
818-889-5600
www.nwcomputing.com

Synopsis: Founded in 1984 by Jon Van Caneghem, New World Computing immediately established itself as a prominent player in the computer-entertainment industry with the release of the fantasy role-playing game Might & Magic. With millions of units sold worldwide, the company's products have continued to set standards in the rapidly changing entertainment-software industry.

In 1996, New World Computing was purchased by The 3DO Company. Under the direction and leadership of president Canegham and executive producer Mark Caldwell, New World Computing's products have strived for state-of-the-art graphics, original music, and innovative sound effects and game design.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: The Might & Magic series (versions I through V), Heroes of Might and Magic I and II

Hot Games in the Works: Heroes of Might and Magic II Expansion Pack, Might & Magic VI, Heroes of Might and Magic III

Online-only Games in the Works: Might and Magic Online

STB

STB Systems
1651 Glenville, Ste. 201
Richardson, TX 75081
972-234-8750
www.stb.com

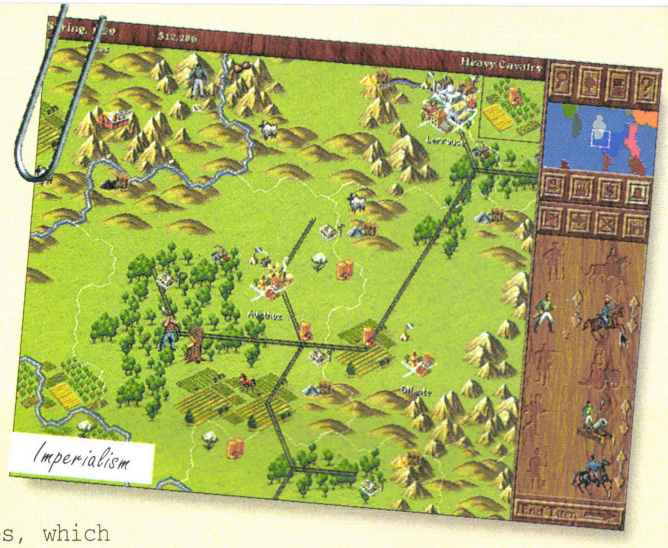
Synopsis: STB is a leading manufacturer of multimedia hardware accessories used to enhance the gameplay experience of consumers. The company is the second-largest maker of video accelerators in the United States.

STB's credo is "to design, produce, and sell high-quality products that expand the capabilities of personal computers. We will do this in an atmosphere of honesty, integrity, enthusiasm, creativity, and concern—toward our employees, customers, and suppliers." To this end, the company aims to ensure quality products by manufacturing, burning in, and testing every new board at its own production facility.

Most Popular Product(s) to Date: Nitro 3D Accelerator

Hot Products in the Works: DVD Theater sound board and Lightspeed 3D Pro accelerator

SSI



Strategic Simulations Inc.
675 Almanor Ave., Ste. 204
Sunnyvale, CA 94086-2901
408-737-6800
www.ssionline.com

Synopsis: One of the industry's most prominent game publishers, SSI is recognized worldwide for its critically acclaimed Five-Star Series, which includes such megahits as Panzer General, Allied General, Fantasy General, and Star General. SSI is also acknowledged as a premier publisher of role-playing games, highly realistic simulations such as Su-27 Flanker and Silent Hunter, and the recently released real-time strategy game War Wind.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Panzer General. This influential wargame, which spawned the Five-Star Series, is still considered one of the finest World War II strategy games ever.

Hot Games in the Works: Imperialism, Panzer General II, and Pacific General

Online Games in the Works: SSI will soon be adding online play to its successful Fantasy General, allowing for Internet battle between masters of fantasy armies.

WIZARDWORKS

WizardWorks
2300 Berkshire Lane
Minneapolis, MN 55441
800-229-2714
www.wizworks.com

Synopsis: Now a division of GT Interactive, WizardWorks has built a reputation as one of the most prolific and successful developers designing add-on levels for popular games such as Doom, Duke Nukem 3D, Warcraft II, and Quake. These level packages usually feature additional weapons, new adversaries, and increased challenges. WizardWorks' newest releases are the GameWizards Interactive Game Guides, which feature comprehensive strategies and tips for completing such hit games as Duke Nukem 3D, Tomb Raider, Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh, Lords of the Realm II, and NASCAR Racing 2.

Most Popular Game(s) to Date: Duke!ZONE add-on package for Duke Nukem 3D, Q!ZONE for Quake, W!ZONE for Warcraft II, and Flight!ZONE for Microsoft Flight Simulator.

Hot Games in the Works: GameWizards for Redneck Rampage, Diablo, Blood, MDK, Unreal, Shadow Warrior, and Magic: The Gathering.

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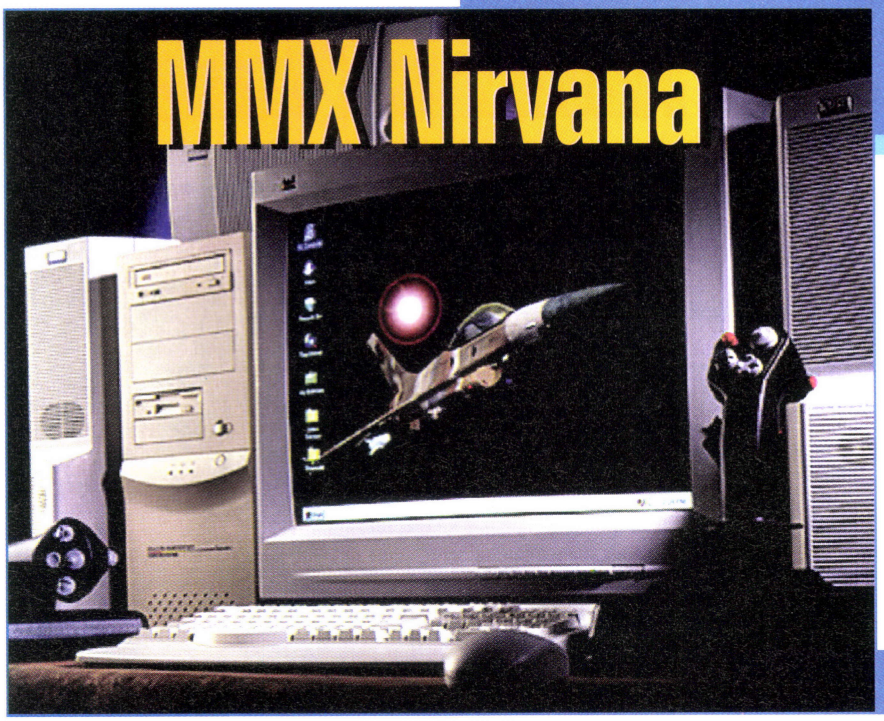


The Mach V is still the system to beat.

There's no doubt about it: Tech-savvy gamers can build a screaming-fast, relatively inexpensive system with some prudent shopping. However, most people don't want to go through the configuration-headache hassles that typically come with building your own PC from scratch.

If you're in the latter category and want the best "prebuilt" gaming PC that money can buy, Falcon Northwest Computer Systems' Mach V is your Holy Grail. *PC Games* reviewed an IDE-based Mach V last year, and it became firmly entrenched in our Hardware Hall Of Fame. So it's fair to say we had lofty expectations for Falcon's latest Mach V—a SCSI-based gaming monster sporting a 200MHz Pentium CPU with MMX technology.

Falcon, which only sells direct, custom-builds every PC it ships to meet each customer's needs; thus, every Mach V is different. However, what each machine has in common is that each and every component is name-brand and has been evaluated to deliver the best gaming performance—and compatibility.

That said, we asked Falcon to ship us their view of the ultimate gaming PC, and to spare no expense in the process. And send they did. If you're looking for an inexpensive system, this Mach V ain't for you; if you're looking for every extra edge you can get in a deathmatch, and money's no object, read on.

This Mach V arrived sporting a new ATX look, and the following components: 512K cache memory, 64MB of 60ns EDO RAM, a Diamond Stealth 3D2000 PCI video card with 4MB of EDO DRAM, a Diamond Monster 3D accelerator board with the 3Dfx chip and 4MB of EDO memory, a Seagate Hawk 2.2GB Ultra-wide SCSI hard drive with a 9ms seek time, a Toshiba 15X SCSI CD-ROM drive, a U.S. Robotics 33.6 modem, a 100mbs Fast Ethernet network card, and a Creative Labs Sound Blaster 16 with a Yamaha Waveforce XG add-on card and 4MB of memory. Whew!

Let's not forget the active-refrigeration CPU cooling system with failure alarm and two additional cooling fans. The 200MHz Pentium is one hot chip—both literally and figuratively. The refrigeration unit may sound over the top, but in extended use, it will deliver improved CPU performance over a machine without one, and that extra edge is what Falcon is all about. The only tweak we'd make is swapping the 2.1GB hard drive for a 4GB—games have bigger installs these days, you know.

The system also came with Altec Lansing ACS55 Dolby Surround Sound Satellite/Subwoofer speakers, a CH Products High-Speed Game Card and F-16 Combatstick, and last—but certainly not least—a ViewSonic G810 21-inch .25-pitch monitor. The G810 ain't cheap at just under $1,500, but it is impressive. Playing network GLQuake games on this monitor, at an average of 40 frames per second in 640-by-480 resolution, is pure gaming heaven—and worth every cent if you've got the coin.

That's the essence of the Mach V: Sure, it wins the benchmark wars compared to assembly-line PCs like those from Micron, Compaq, or NEC, but over the long haul, it also delivers superior gaming performance and virtually zero configuration hassles running both DOS and Win 95 games. This alone, for many people, is well worth Falcon's price of admission, and the reason why the Mach V retains its position on *PC Games*' Hardware Hall of Fame.

—Steve Klett

HOW FAST IS IT?

Processor Score:	**140**
Video Score:	**180**
Hard Drive Score:	**199**

**PC Games* Labs uses a standard Acer 200MHz Pentium as a baseline system for comparison, with baseline benchmarks of 100 in processor, video, and hard-drive categories. Computer systems are compared using WinBench 97.

Falcon Mach V

Falcon Northwest Computer Systems
800-258-6778
www.falcon-nw.com
Price: $3,995 for Ultra-Wide SCSI, $3,195 for IDE

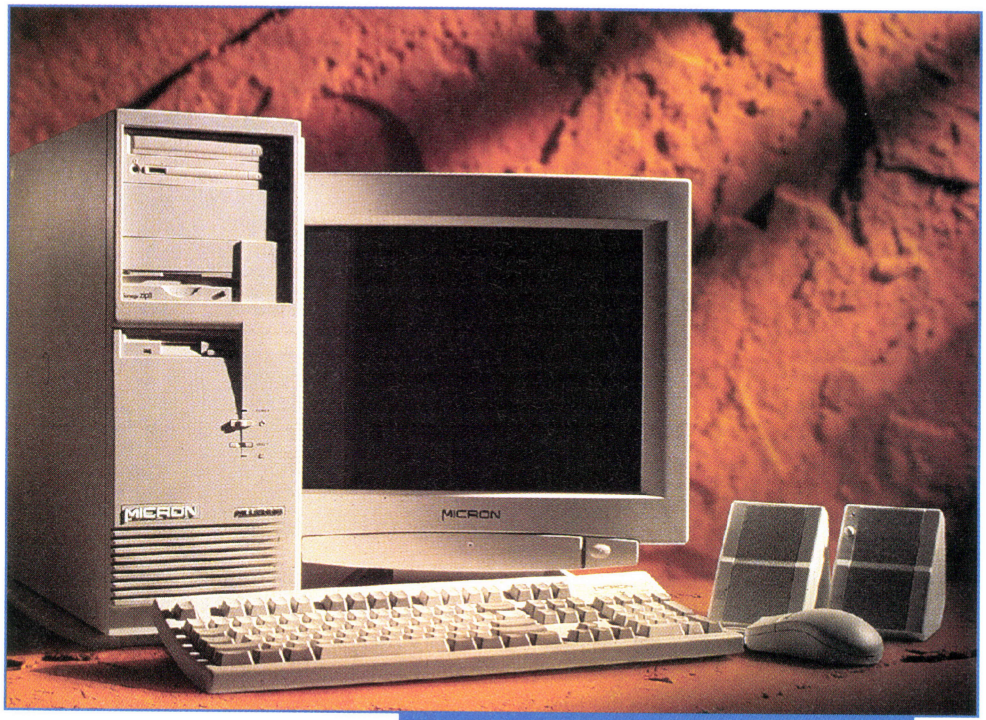
RATING: A

ViewSonic G810

ViewSonic Corp.
800-888-8583
www.viewsonic.com
Street Price: $1,495

RATING: A-

MMX Nirvana



Micron's MXE is a solid performer, but it's not cheap.

Micron Millennia MXE

RATING: B+

It's happened again: My expensive high-end computer is obsolete. It's hard to escape the fact that you're always trying to catch up with the latest "thing." Just a few, short months ago, a Pentium 200MHz was considered top-of-the-line, and owning one would have had everyone on your street burning with jealousy. Then up pops this MMX thing, and my P200 is suddenly falling behind new models like this Micron Millennia MXE sitting on my desk.

Though Micron builds to order, it also has a number of standard configurations geared toward gaming: a 200MHz MMX processor, 32MB of EDO RAM, 3.1GB hard drive, 16X CD-ROM drive, Sound Blaster AWE32 sound card, Diamond Stealth 3D 2000 video card, and a Diamond Monster 3D card. These components just *scream* games. I couldn't wait to get this baby running.

Setting up is a simple matter of pulling everything out of the box and plugging in all of the cables. A large setup map comes complete with clear, easily understandable diagrams and instructions. Set up done, I rubbed my hands together with glee in anticipation of playing some games. Micron throws in a generous amount of software, including the MMX-enabled game Pod. I didn't even have to wait for the installation, as the game came pre-installed and pre-configured. All I had to do was slide the CD in and let Autoplay take care of the rest. Fortunately, the game played great, and alleviated my biggest fear, a letdown.

Next, I installed Quake. Keeping in mind that the Diamond Monster 3D card is based on a 3Dfx Voodoo chipset, I also loaded up GLQuake. Wow, was that an eye opener! You ain't played Quake until you've played with the transparent-water setting on.

One thing that's still bothersome about most consumer "game" systems, and Micron is no exception, is the total avoidance of DOS drivers. The MXE is configured solely for play in Windows 95, so if you quit to DOS you'll find you can't access the CD-ROM drive or use the mouse. For a novice computer user, this could be a deal breaker. Even worse, the DOS driver for CD-ROM support is in the AUTOEXEC.BAT file, but its been remarked (REM) out so it won't be processed at start-up. Many inexperienced gamers won't know how to fix that, and it should have been done for them.

Once DOS support was sorted out, the MXE turned in respectable performance benchmarks. Out of the three 200MHz Pentiums reviewed here, it posted the second-highest CPU score, and was reasonably close behind the Falcon. Not surprisingly, the MXE is priced in Falcon country as well, at $3,323 with monitor. (Micron Electronics; 800-438-3343; www.micronpc.com)—*Christopher Tou*

HOW FAST IS IT?

Processor Score:	134
Video Score:	156
Hard Drive Score:	143

**PC Games* Labs uses a standard Acer 200MHz Pentium as a baseline system for comparison, with baseline benchmarks of 100 in processor, video, and hard-drive categories. Computer systems are compared using WinBench 97.

Sony VAIO PCV-120

RATING: B

Sony's launch into the PC market has generally been well-thought-out and well-presented. At a time when CPU power is a key component in playing today's games with all their bells and whistles on, a P200 is certainly the way to look. The PCV-120 offers a fine all-around MMX machine for the multimedia family. That is, it's not the choice of the hardened gamer. In fairness, Sony doesn't bill the PCV-120 as a game machine, but at $2,299 without a monitor, the question to be

Next Month!

PC Games takes up the MMX challenge and builds its own screaming-fast Pentium system for less money than off-the-shelf systems.

answered is whether this P200 is the best place to start in building a game system.

On the plus side, this machine's range of software, the inherent speed of the Intel P200, and 32MB RAM are a good starting point. But for gamers, the built-in 2MB ATI Rage 3D, while fairly substantial at a casual glance, is not a top choice in gaming graphics hardware. Because video-processing power is so key in today's PC retail market, the fact that this card is underpowered, poorly supported, and irritating to configure for many games makes it difficult to recommend the PCV-120.

In addition, the standard-issue 15-inch monitor (complete with built-in speakers) certainly looks the part of the cutting-edge home PC, but a viewing area of less than 14 inches doesn't do full justice to the quality of the .25 dot pitch. Sony now has a 17-inch variation on the same monitor, so if you are in the market for a PCV-120, look for it. As for the monitor-mounted speakers, they are a little light weight and lack a great bass line, but provide solid surround sound.

The rest of the PCV-120 package is excellent. A hefty 3.8GB hard drive is ample, and the overall focus of the machine—including the 33.6 modem, productivity software suite, and videophone—makes it an attractive addition to the upwardly mobile family. But compared to the other MMX P200s evaluated here, the Sony scored close, but trailed behind in the all-important CPU and video benchmarks that are critical to gamers.

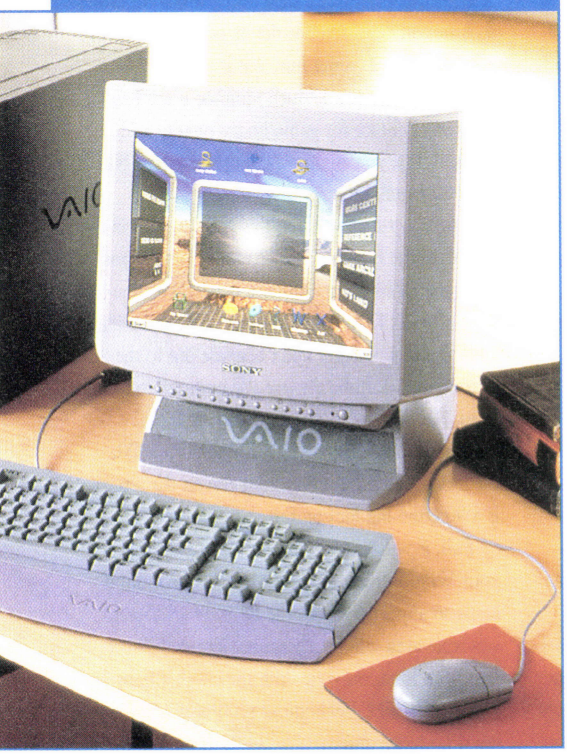
Sony has put together a solid all-around package that could use a bit of extra pump and fewer bells and whistles per dollars spent; it comes up just short in the critical categories necessary to attract the genuine, passionate gamer. Adding enhanced 32-bit sound and better 3D graphics acceleration would have tipped the balance more in its favor. (Sony Electronics; www. sony.com/pc; 800-476-6972) —*Rob Smith*

HOW FAST IS IT?

Processor Score:	126
Video Score:	144
Hard Drive Score:	131

**PC Games* Labs uses a standard Acer 200MHz Pentium as a baseline system for comparison, with baseline benchmarks of 100 in processor, video, and hard-drive categories. Computer systems are compared using WinBench 97.

Troublesome 3D video holds the PCV-120 back.



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Monitors Big & Small

KD-1750

RATING: A-

The KD-1750 ranks with the likes of NEC and Sony.

So, you're in the market for a new monitor that's easy to stare at for hours of multiplayer Quake? You want a monitor with a non-glaring flat screen that gives crisp color. You want a monitor that's a snap to install without any brain-racking configurations, which eat up time that could be spent playing Interstate '76. Well then, drop this magazine (after reading it thoroughly, of course) and check out the 17-inch Visual Sensations KD-1750.

This product was a pure blessing when it entered my office. See, my job requires me to stare at a monitor all day long, and of course, my corneas would be killing me by the end of the day with my old screen. Since "the arrival," I haven't had to push my eyeballs back into their sockets once—honest! And the installation couldn't be any easier, because the KD really is a Win 95 plug-and-play–compatible monitor. Installation was as involved as connecting a few simple cables—it's that easy. When I fired up my system, the quality of color and detail were, in a word, outstanding. The colors were brighter and text didn't bleed or appear fuzzy. This monitor is pure butter.

Add in features such as Energy Star conservation and VESA high-resolution standards, a non-glaring flat-screen, a maximum resolution of 1600-by-1200, low radiation emissions, and the addition of RGB inputs, and the KD-1750 is very competitive when viewed against other 17-inch monitors.

What about price? Equally competitive. The KD-1750 has a suggested list price of $753, which is comparable to the likes of Sony and NEC, but still higher than Mag or Optiquest.

All in all, because of its overall ease and quality, this is a monitor I'd recommend to my mother. That is, if she liked computers at all. Since she doesn't, I'll recommend it to you. Now that I'm finished writing about it, I'm going to get back to staring at a little game of MDK! (KDS; 800-283-1311; www.kdsusa.com) *—Joe McCloud*

Hey, no buttons!

MAG DJ702

RATING: B

You first glance at the Mag Innovision DJ702 and think to yourself, "What's missing here?" There's a box, a screen, a stand—and then you put your finger on it: There don't seem to be any controls. No dimmer, no vertical adjust, no horizontal adjust, not a single button anywhere on the monitor!

Don't panic—there may not be any buttons, but there is a dial. And it's all you need. The monitor is controlled entirely through a single pushable dial below the screen. You push it to summon the on-screen menu, and then navigate the control menus by turning the combination-style dial. Contrast, brightness, shape, rotation, zooming, degaussing—it's all handled from the onscreen menu, with additional pushes of the dial to select your preferences. No button pushing. No squinting at the tiny engraved legends under tiny, identical buttons. A child could learn it in five seconds, and I mean that as a high compliment.

During the last several years Mag has built a reputation for producing high-quality monitors and selling them at a low, low price. The DJ702 is no exception. The 17-inch screen is flat and delivers a sharp image—not as good as a Sony 200sf, but pretty darn close. Colors are a bit muted compared to the Optiquest V775, but still very pleasing. Reasonably priced at $650, this is a monitor to consider. (Mag; 800-827-3998; www.maginnovision.com) *—Daniel Morris*

Bigger isn't always better.

NEC E1100

RATING: C+

Although some will consider the following position heresy, 20-inch and 21-inch monitors are too expensive for the masses and shouldn't be the object of gamer lust. But if you can't be convinced that a 17-inch monitor is the best all-around choice for game-image quality and affordability, you could do a lot worse than NEC's E1100 21-inch monitor.

At $1,599 on the street, this NEC is right in the middle of the big-screen price range. Not surprisingly, the E1100's performance is middle-of-the-road as well. Thanks to a .28 dot pitch and a flat CRT, onscreen images don't degrade out to the edges. But unfortunately, even at optimum refresh rates, 1024-by-768 SVGA is still quite fuzzy compared to 17-inch monitors. At 800-by-600, clarity increases, but everything else on the screen is a little too big for comfort.

Still, if you want to have a lot of stuff on your Windows 95 screen, or want Quake opponents to appear life-size, the E1100's 19.5-inch viewable area will be attractive. Just make sure you have room on your desk for it—this baby is a monster. (NEC Technologies; 714-457-0777; www.nectech.com) *—George T. Chronis*

The V775 delivers exceptional images at a low price.

Optiquest V775

RATING: A

Don't let ViewSonic's own PR fool you: Optiquest may be the company's "value line," but the 17-inch V775 is no cheapie monitor. In fact, it's one of the best buys in its class. True, the V775's tube is slightly curved, while the tubes in the 17-inch Sony CPD-220VS and Panasonic 17-inch Panaflat are flat as a board, but the clarity and the color depth of the V775's .26mm dot-pitch display are exceptional.

Chalk it up to personal bias, but a glossy clear-coat and super-sharp images are what set a monitor apart in this reviewer's eyes. Don't get me wrong— I love the sharpness of the Sony, but the anti-glare, slightly matte finish isn't as appealing as the glossy coating on the V775 for color saturation and clarity. Even more impressive, images displayed on the Optiquest are sharp up and into the edges, despite the slight curvature.

Considering its display prowess, the V775 is a fantastic value at a street price of around $600. But there's more to like. The 16-inch viewable area is housed in an attractive white casing of high-quality manufacture that takes up very little desk space. Image controls are extensive, but we have to commend the configuration for minimizing the number of buttons and knobs that make the prospect of adjusting some other monitors a daunting task. In keeping with the rest of these virtues, Windows 95 liked the V775 at first pass, so installation and setup took all of five minutes to complete.

ViewSonic got it right with this Optiquest; that's why you'll find it in our Hardware Hall of Fame later in this section. If you're in the market for a 17-inch monitor, check it out. (ViewSonic Corp.; 800-888-8583; www.viewsonic.com)

—George T. Chronis

Optiquest Q100

RATING: B

Viewsonic positions the Q100 as an "affordable large-screen monitor for mainstream graphics, non-linear editing (say what?), and computer-aided design and multi-tasking business applications." Snooze. Fortunately, we ignored this positioning and threw some "real" applications at the Q100: games.

While not as stunning as its .25 pitch, 21-inch, $1,500 G810 cousin at handling GLQuake in a network fragfest (see story, page 203), the Q100 still impresses. Picture clarity is crisp—including edges and corners—and color reproduction and screen-refresh rates are remarkable (80Hz at 1,280-by-1,024 resolution). In addition to Quake, the Q100 proved quite adept at handling games such as Comanche 3 and Jack Nicklaus Golf 4 in fine style.

The Q100 also scores highly in the user-friendliness department, taking a grand total of about five minutes to get going out of the box. If the unit has a downside, it's the curved screen, which presents a slight fish-bowl effect (the G810 has a flat screen). It also carries a lofty price tag of around $1,000 on the street. This certainly isn't cheap, but if you're looking for a nice compromise between a quality 17-inch and top-of-the-line 20-inch display, the Q100 is a solid choice. (Viewsonic Corp.; 800-888-8583; www.viewsonic.com) *—Steve Klett*

A big value at $1,000.

SPEAKERS

Panasonic MPC250

RATING: B+

Are Panasonic speakers hip to the needs of gamers? Yes indeed. The company's new EAB MPC250 system gives you a 10-watt subwoofer with two 10-watt satellite speakers for an estimated street price of $99.

Best of all, the MPC250 package pays attention to bass. That's important, because deep, low bass that doesn't distort when you set off explosions in games is a must for any speaker system directed at gamers.

The growls and rumbles of Quake shine through—all of Trent Reznor's hard work rewarded! With its very reasonable price, we recommend this system highly. (Panasonic; 800-742-8086; www.panasonic.com/alive) *—Daniel Morris*

Cambridge MicroWorks

RATING: A+

Cambridge has upped the PC sound ante once again with its MicroWorks subwoofer/satellite speaker system.

You get a pair of 4-inch-wide desktop "cube" speakers and a very impressive-looking floor-standing 6.5-inch woofer with a three-channel amplifier. In finished black or computer bone white, MicroWorks is visually impressive—these are not speakers you'll want to hide. Sounds good, but how much power do they pump out? How about 67 watts of wall-shakin', window-rattlin', ear-bustin' power—reproducing acoustic and bass in fine style. Music and games both sound terrific.

MicroWorks may seem a bit expensive at $349, but when you consider what you're getting, it's an excellent all-around value. (Cambridge SoundWorks; 800-525-4434; www.hifi.com) *—Steve Klett*

Toshiba XM-5702 & XM-5701

A year ago, an 8X CD-ROM drive was cutting-edge enough to cost you nearly $200. If you bought one then, don't read further, because you're going to be upset about what Toshiba has done.

Okay, you were warned.

Maybe it's because DVD-ROM is upon us and drive-makers expect consumer interest in older technology to plummet, but severely fast CD-ROM drives can be had for a pittance today. Toshiba is right on top of this wave with its XM-5702 12X IDE and XM-5701 15X SCSI-2 disc spinners. How cheap? The SCSI model has already been advertised for around $150, the IDE unit for $120.

Both of the Toshiba drives are no-nonsense solid performers, with only a standard-size, tray-open button and headphone volume control on the front. The IDE model can move data as fast as 13.3MB per second under ideal conditions, while the SCSI versions can push 10MB per second. The SCSI spinner can access data more swiftly, however.

After several months of use, both the XM-5702 and XM-5701 have operated flawlessly. Their simplicity and reliability is why you'll find both units as standard equipment in Falcon's IDE and SCSI Mach V systems.

My only two gripes are minor ones. First, neither CD-ROM drive comes with the audio cable necessary to connect it to a sound card. That's not a problem if you have no intention of playing audio CDs—you'll never miss it. However, both Toshiba drives use a non-standard plug into the back of the unit, so you can't reuse the cable from a previous drive; your only option is to buy the cable separately from Toshiba. That's a small slight, but meaningful when CD-ROM drives from the likes of Pioneer and HiVal include a cable and more users are turning their PCs into second stereos. This second gripe is very minor, but persistent: When the 15X SCSI gets turnin' at full speed, it can make quite a racket. If you have a metal case that amplifies sound, the extra noise may detract from your gaming experience.

The reason the SCSI gets a higher grade is that SCSI components usually command a much higher premium compared to IDE units. Put simply, this is a screaming-fast SCSI component that would normally cost double the price, making it an excellent value. The IDE drive, good as it is, is already threatened in the speed race from a new 24X drive from Panasonic. No rest for the wicked... (Toshiba; 714-457-0777; www.toshiba.com) —*George T. Chronis*

HARDWARE HALL OF FAME

Wondering what hardware to buy to get the best game machine for your money? It's easy: just check *PC Games'* running list of our top hardware recommendations. Each month, we'll update the Hall of Fame as we review new products.

CATEGORY	PRODUCT	DETAILS	OUR RATING
PC	Falcon Mach V	Falcon Northwest; 800-258-6778; approx. $4,000	A
Monitor	Optiquest V775 17-inch	ViewSonic; 800-888-8583; approx. $600	A
CD-ROM drive	XM5702 12-speed	Toshiba; 714-457-0777; approx. $120	B+
Sound card	AWE32	Creative Labs; 800-998-5227; $129	A
Speakers	ACS55 Power Gaming System	Altec Lansing; 800-258-3288; approx. $150	A
Joystick	F-16 Combatstick	CH Products; 619-598-2518; $70	A+
Gamepad	SideWinder Gamepad	Microsoft; 206-882-8080; $39	A+
Modem	SupraExpress 336i SP	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $125	A
Graphics card	Stealth 3D 3000	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $160	A
Key add-on	Monster 3D	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $180	A

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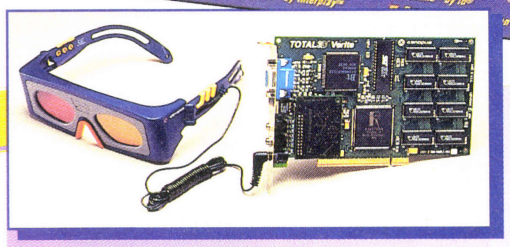

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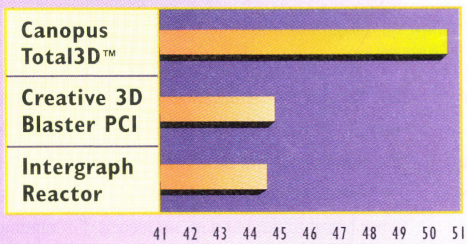

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–Win95 Magazine

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–boot Magazine

"The Top Rated 2-D/3-D combo card, the Canopus Total3D, scored a 90 [out of 100] for its combination of excellent 3-D performance, above-average 2-D performance, and extra features."
–FamilyPC Magazine

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TECHNOBABBLE S.O.S.

EarthSiege errors? Problems with your disc drive? You ask, we'll answer...

By Patrick Marshall

Q I purchased EarthSiege 2 a while back, and it ran very well on my other system under Windows 95. I now have a Pentium 90 with 16MB of RAM. Unfortunately, when I'm running the game under Windows 95, I get an error message that refers to an invalid page fault and an exception error. Can you explain this?

M. Mead
San Francisco, CA

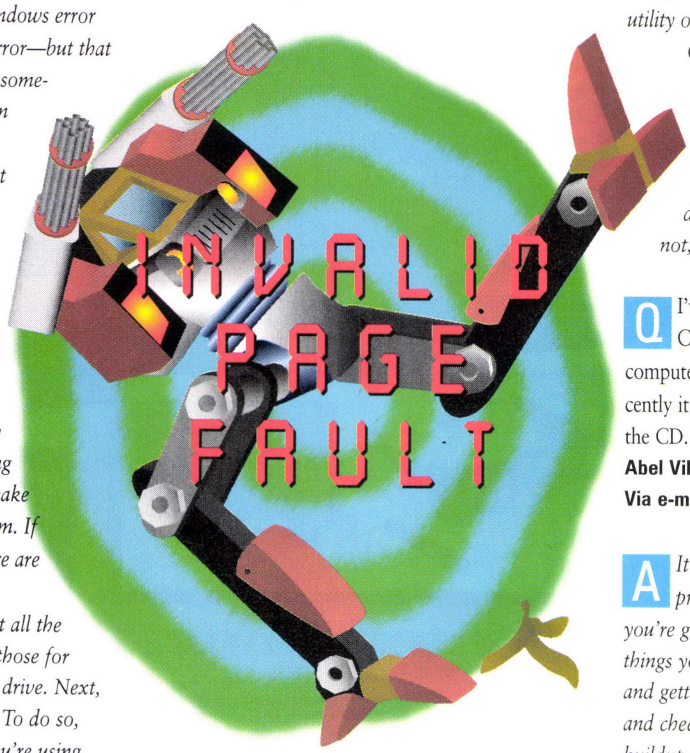
A *The message indicates a Windows error rather than an EarthSiege error—but that doesn't mean that EarthSiege isn't somehow involved. Because the problem apparently only occurs when you try to run EarthSiege, it means that there is some sort of communication problem between Windows 95 and the game.*

The first thing to try—because it's the easiest—is to make sure you're not running any other applications when you try to run EarthSiege. Turn off any programs that might be autoloading when you boot Windows just to make sure they're not causing the problem. If you still get the error message, there are several other steps you can take.

Start by making sure you've got all the latest Windows drivers, including those for your sound, video, and CD-ROM drive. Next, optimize your CD drive's caching. To do so, you first have to know whether you're using protected-mode or real-mode drivers. Go to the Control Panel and double-click on the System icon, then select the Device Manager tab. If you see a branch on the tree for your CD-ROM, you know you're using protected-mode drivers. If that's the case, click on the Performance tab, then the File System button, and then on the CD-ROM tab. Select the appropriate speed for your CD drive, keeping in mind that choosing a speed higher than your drive rating won't improve performance. Finally, move the supplemental cache slider all the way to the right.

If you're using real-mode drivers, click on the Performance tab, then File System. Then select "No read-ahead" in the Optimize Access Pattern box. There are two other things you'll want to do. First, make sure your hard drive has enough free space. If you're down to 10MB or less, you should free up more. Finally, run ScanDisk or another disk utility to make sure you don't have any problems with your drive.

Q I recently purchased a Diamond 64 3D Stealth Video card. This purchase has caused me by far the most aggravation since I've started installing cards on my PC. After installation, I immediately had a conflict. My speakers had a constant tone on them



and Windows wouldn't shut down unless I did a cold boot. It turns out that my conflict was with the existing graphics adapter on my motherboard.

Now, you might say, "Just disable it." That was what I tried to do, but with no success. I'm running Win 95, and whenever I would go into the Control Panel and into System to delete it, Win 95 would just recognize the graphics adapter on the motherboard after rebooting and automatically reinstall it. I talked with the tech-support people at Diamond, and all they could tell me is that they are working with Microsoft to develop a program that will disable the auto-detection of my hardware by Win 95. Needless to say, I've returned the card. I've thought of buying a competing card. Will I have the same problem?

James Dunscombe
Via e-mail

A *A different graphics adapter won't help you solve this problem. Fact is, it's your motherboard that isn't doing its job. If a computer-maker is going to put graphics support on the motherboard, it's their responsibility to give you a way to turn it off. The best motherboards will automatically switch off onboard graphics when you insert a graphics adapter into a slot. Those motherboards that can't generally offer one of two methods for doing so—either by accessing the BIOS setup utility or by setting jumpers on the motherboard. Check your system manual for the appropriate method. If your motherboard doesn't offer either method of shutting off the onboard graphics adapter, call the manufacturer to see if there is an updated BIOS available that will do the job. If not, it's time to buy a different motherboard.*

Q I've got a 486/33SX and a double-speed CD-ROM drive. When I first bought my computer the CD drive worked perfectly, but recently it gives me error messages and it can't read the CD. What can I do?

Abel Villanueva
Via e-mail

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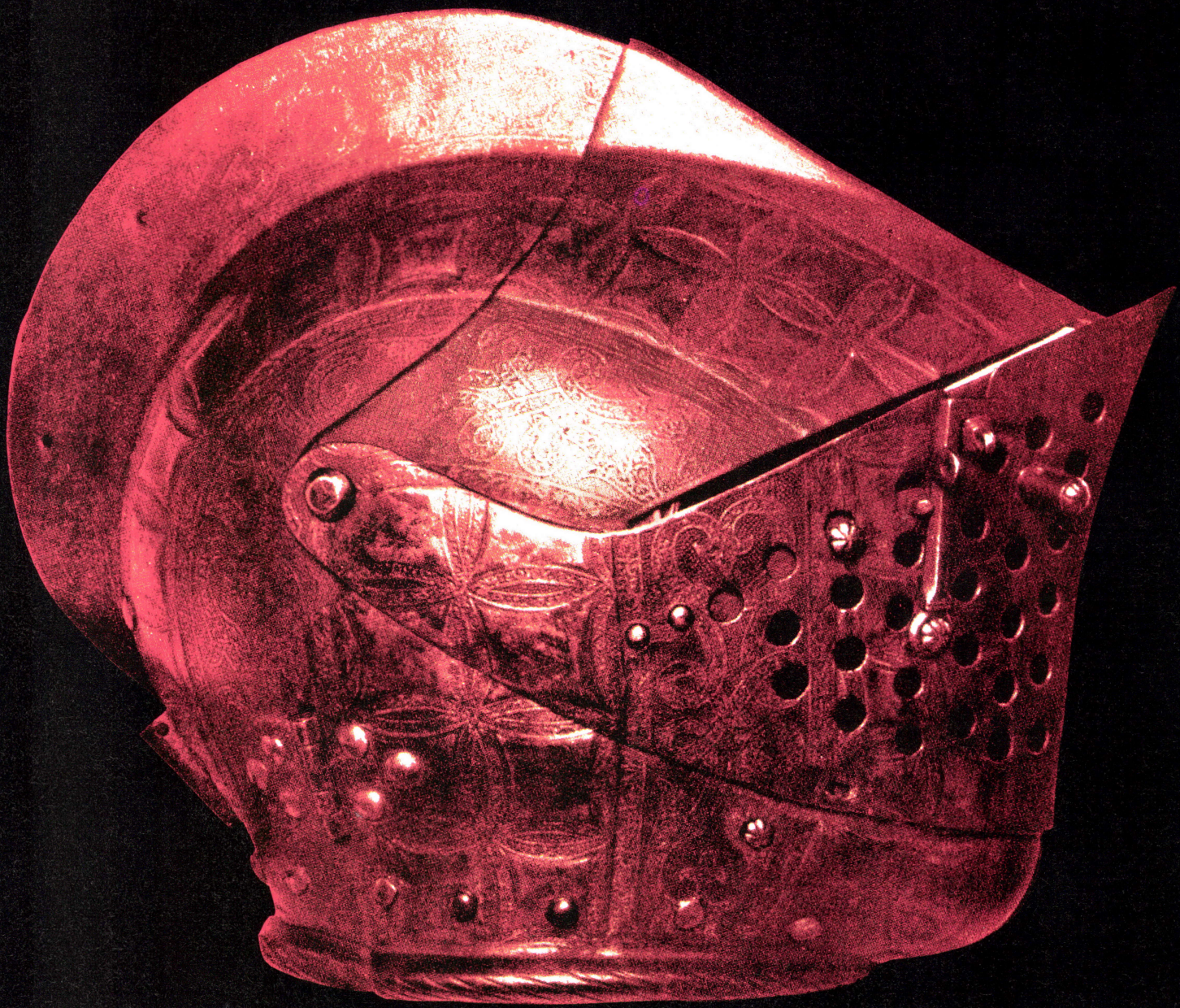

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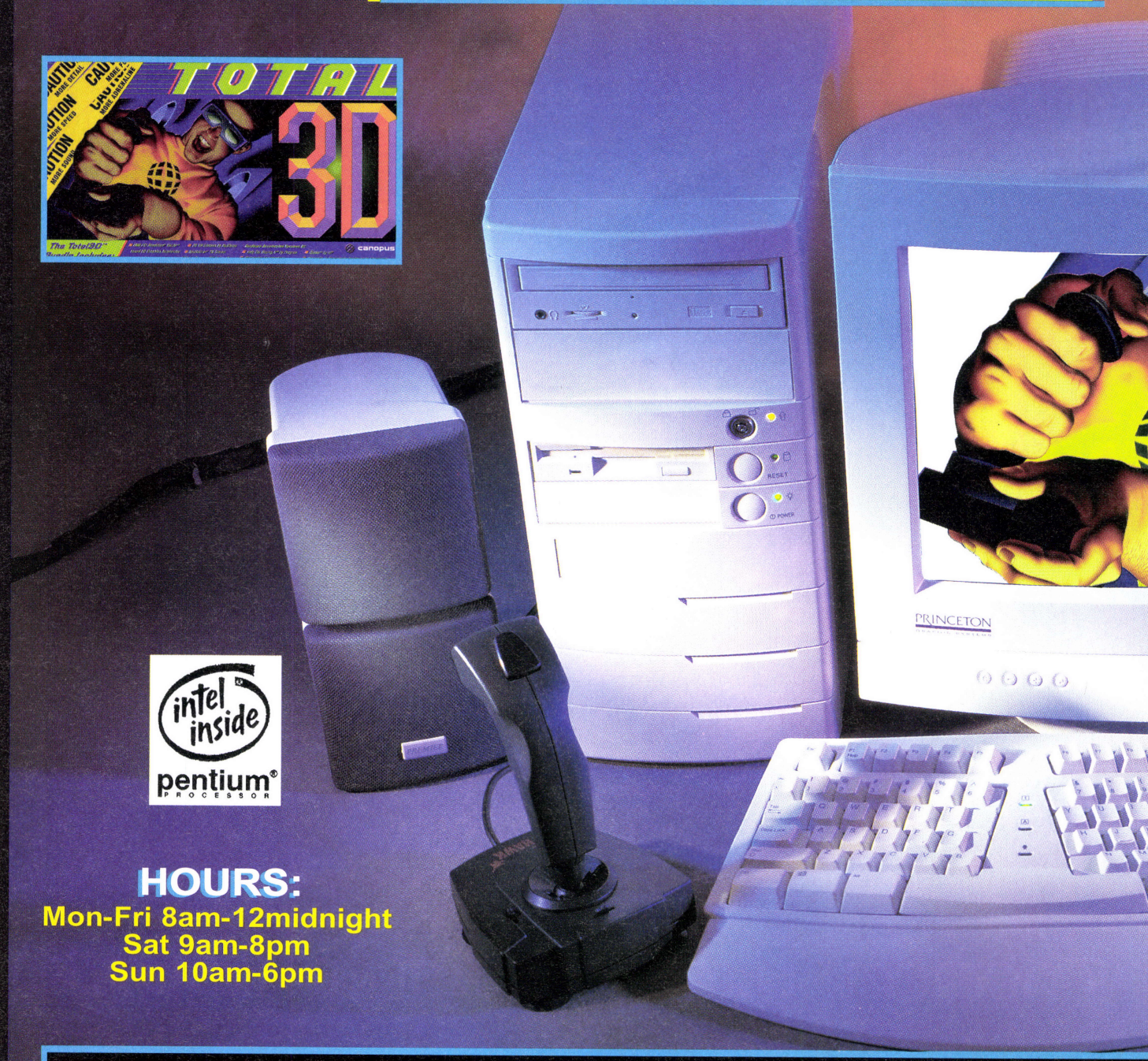

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FACE-OFF

Once Upon a Time... Who Cares?

Daniel Morris *Blade*

"Every man in his lifetime tells but one story."—F. Scott Fitzgerald

That little bit of wisdom certainly seems true of the gaming industry. For many gamers, the constant recycling of yesterday's ideas leaves little else to do but blast buddies in deathmatches—story be damned. Others find the mindless pursuit of slaughter to be the main appeal of PC games, particularly when playing online. Assistant Editor Daniel Morris laments this state of affairs in crusading **bold**; Blade's rebuttals are in chic *italics*.

Even in Hollywood, somebody yells, "Where's the story?" True, he's shot immediately, but at least someone asks the question. Like all "serious" gamers, I'm worried. A total lack of attention is being paid to strong story in game development, particularly in games designed for online play. Too many hot games seem thrown together as excuses for deathmatches, with little time spent conceiving interesting plots with engaging social environments and immersive game worlds. Do we really have to be lobotomized to enjoy online multiplay?

My dense young friend, you're missing the whole point. Games don't tell you a story, they encourage you to make a story. Lobotomized? Far from it! Tell me that Quake has suffered for its lack of story in the online community. Tell me that anyone cares about the "alien scum" in Duke matches. Tell me that the European theater is really at stake in Red Alert skirmishes. No, online games don't need a story; they create their own stories in the folklore of friends who meet and defeat each other online. That's the important story.

You're not going to hide behind that *Masterpiece Theatre* bard crap this time, bucko. I won't let you sanctify sloppy game development. There's certainly nothing wrong with recounting a good mindless fragfest, but games can be carried so much further than this, and too few companies seem interested. Online gaming—the great frontier of games—opens up tremendous possibilities for mutual world-building, interaction, and plot advancement. How many games are exploring these possibilities?

You sound like a politician spouting off about the road not taken. PC gaming is a business, and game companies succeed by giving gamers what gamers want. Game development is powered by the demands of gamers themselves—all the Doom and C&C clones are testimony to that.

They're testimony to the self-fulfilling prophecy that people buy what they are familiar with. Let me tell you where you're wrong: Social interaction games sell, and sell well. Perhaps you aren't aware of the thousands of MUDs that have been addicting gamers for years—and those are just text-only environments. Ultima Online and Meridian 59 are great examples of where online gaming needs to go—players working together in a socially interactive situation toward the solution of the game's crisis.

I'll grant that you have a glimmer of an argument there. But all your proselytizing about more story development ignores the reality of the greater majority of people playing games. Look what happened with Diablo and all the grief people endured from the ignorant player-killers. Unless everyone in the game environment is role-playing the way the game was designed, there are going to be people spoiling it who don't care about the story at all.

How condescending—you should work in game development. Designers need to realize that the "online gamer" is not just some cookie-cutter frag addict, but is in fact interested in playing all types of games over the Internet. There's time and room for *every* genre. That's why it's so discouraging when I hear developers boast about their game's "multiplayer element." All too often, it's simply their shorthand for "you can kill somebody over the Net."

And the problem with that is?

For more evolved humans, there's more to life and gaming than death alone. MUDs have survived as long as they have because they offer a creativity and interaction that few PC games provide.

But MUDs are played by true enthusiasts. The mass market of fragfest addicts doesn't give a rat's ass about the story. How do you accommodate both?

I'm not saying we convert Tommy the Killboy; let him frag all day and night if that's what he wants. But the industry is ignoring the rest of the gaming world. Eventually, most of us want to relish the filling meal of a strongly developed game world after we've nibbled on a fragfest's appetizers. Let's not be satisfied with appealing to the lowest common denominator in gaming.

Now who's being condescending, you elitist twit? Don't belittle what the vast majority enjoys and requests more of. It's not the job of game developers to educate the masses in the niceties of the social environment. Perhaps after Tommy's had his ass kicked enough times, he'll turn to the more cerebral pursuit of fantasy-world politics. I'll give him your number.

Let the education begin.

Daniel Morris has actually read *The Great Gatsby* (once via Cliff's Notes and twice for realsies).

Blade, not to be outdone, has actually read Plato's *Timaeus*, and frankly, once was enough, thank you.

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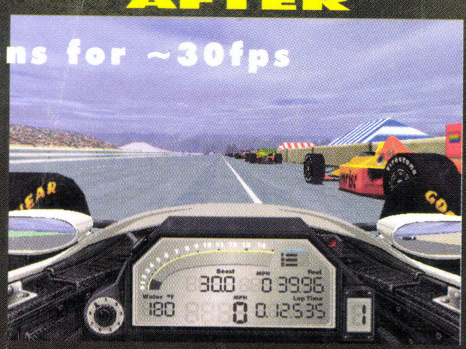

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